

# Visions: Gauguin and his Time



Van Gogh Studies 3





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## Van Gogh Studies 3

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Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

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Cover image: Paul Gauguin, *Vision of the sermon* (detail), 1888, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

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1. Paul Gauguin, *Vision of the sermon*, 1888, oil on canvas, 72.2 × 91 cm.  
National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; W 245/WN 308

# Foreword

Paul Gauguin's 1888 *Vision of the sermon* is central to *Visions: Gauguin and his time*. From the moment the painting was first exhibited at the 1889 Salon des Vingt in Brussels, it has been the focus of discussion, and to this day it continues to provoke profound reassessment and interpretation by art historians. In 2005 *Vision of the sermon* was the key work in *Gauguin's vision*, a wide-ranging exhibition assembled by Belinda Thomson, and this placing of the painting in its 'natural' artistic, cultural and historical context with works by other artists who depicted Breton subjects and painters to whom Gauguin was indebted, offered viewers countless unexpected ways to look at the work in a new light.

The capacity of *Vision of the sermon* to prompt in-depth research one hundred and twenty-five years after it was painted is demonstrated both by the lectures given at the symposium during the Edinburgh exhibition and by Gamboni's essay *The vision of a vision*. Here Gamboni argues that the painting 'deserves its paradigmatic status ... in that it is a self-reflexive work dealing in visual terms with issues of perception, cognition and representation.' He believes that it offers a vision conceived as a 'sensory perception of visual reality', as an inward vision – that is to say a 'transcendental experience of an image'.

Gamboni's stimulating article is accompanied in this third volume of *Van Gogh Studies* by three essays based on lectures delivered during the Edinburgh symposium in 2005. In *The décor of dreams* Juliet Simpson addresses the art critic Aurier's specific contribution to the promotion of Gauguin as the textbook example of the contemporary symbolist artist, schooled in 'the suggestive and radical potential of the decorative'. In *From Gauguin to Péladan*, Rodolphe Rapetti shifts attention to Gauguin's former friend Emile Bernard, who in the early 1890s responded to *Vision of the sermon* by seeking a 'much more systematic way of subverting the modern tradition, in so far as it tackled style'. Rapetti suggests that while these works are still linked to cloisonism stylistically, in intellectual terms they are expressions of a new direction in the artist's thinking, based in part on a 'religious feeling' propagated by Aurier and by Péladan's idealizing mystical symbolism. The Belgian art world's critical reaction to *Vision of the sermon* and other works by the artist in 1889 and 1891 is meticulously described and analysed in Elise Eckermann's essay. She believes that it was Gauguin's sculptures, not his paintings, that opened the way at this time to a widely accepted symbolist view of all his work.

In *Gauguin's maverick sage* June Hargrove presents a challenging vision of Gauguin's portraits of his 'alter ego' Meijer de Haan, with whom he worked in Brittany for a considerable period. Hargrove argues that Gauguin, using a symbolist vocabulary and inspired by contemporary literary sources, replaced traditional iconography with 'new' symbols that had their own power of suggestion, so that 'the work's potential meaning opened out from the core of the subject into the spectator's imagination.'

In her essay, *Musée Rodin: Thorvaldsen as a role model*, Sandra Kisters explores 'influences on the biographical image making of modern artists'. She suggests that the Thorvaldsen Museum was in a number of ways the inspiration for the Musée Rodin, which opened in 1919. Both museums can be seen as making a supportive contribution to the 'nation', and both also house the donations of recognized artists, who spent virtually the whole of their artistic careers in one place.

'Vision' is also the key word in two essays that are revised versions of lectures given by Van Gogh Museum Visiting Fellows in the History of 19th-Century Art: Richard Thomson in 2007 and Patricia Mainardi in 2008. In *Seeing Visions, Painting Visions*, Richard Thomson convincingly analyses the diverse ways in which French artists working in the early Third Republic responded through their imagery to contemporary concepts of '*la psychologie nouvelle*'. One striking similarity between the very varied expressions by very different artists, Thomson argues, is that they were essentially unable to find new visual forms to express 'visionary mental experience'. Gauguin, too, still linked 'the visionary' and 'a vision' in *Vision of the sermon*, and did not express 'inner experience alone'.

In *Paths forgotten, calls unheard* Patricia Mainardi offers the reader a new view of nineteenth-century illustrations, including caricatures. She proposes the integration of research into such illustrations into mainstream art history, arguing that illustration is not the poor relation of 'the art of drawing' but an important medium in its own right 'and one that has often freed the artist to produce significant and memorable images'. Mainardi argues that artists used illustrations as a means of seeking new 'forms of narration' and introduced a new, formal idiom that became a source of inspiration for many nineteenth-century artists – Van Gogh among them. We hope that this volume of *Van Gogh Studies* can serve as just such an inspiration for research into nineteenth-century art history as a whole and for you, the reader, in particular.

Finally, the Board takes this opportunity to thank Belinda Thomson, who acted as guest editor for this volume and who made the publication of several essays possible.

For the Editorial Board,

Chris Stolwijk, *Editor-in-chief*



# Note to the reader

*Van Gogh Studies* publishes recent, in-depth research into Van Gogh and related areas of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art and culture, which is representative of current trends in the study of western European art. The series is published annually as an anthology of essays, and will, on occasion, also include monographic studies.

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References to Paul Gauguin's works are given in the form of the following numbers: the W number refers to Georges Wildenstein, *Gauguin: I. Catalogue*, Paris 1964; the WN number to Sylvie Crussard, Martine Heudron and Daniel Wildenstein, *Gauguin: Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage: Catalogue de l'œuvre peint (1873–1888)*, 2 vols., Paris & Milan 2001; and the G number to Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and ceramics of Paul Gauguin*, Baltimore 1963.

References to Emile Bernard's paintings are given in the form of an L number, which refers to Jean-Jacques Luthi, *Emile Bernard: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Paris 1982.



1. Emile Bernard, *Breton women in the meadow (Pardon at Pont-Aven)*, 1888, oil on canvas, 74 × 90 cm. Private collection; L 114

# **The vision of a vision: Perception, hallucination, and potential images in Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon***

Dario Gamboni

Few works of art can boast of being made the subject of a full-scale exhibition comprising almost a hundred works and accompanied by a scholarly catalogue and an international conference. This exceptional honour was bestowed in 2005 upon Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* (see p. 6, ill. 1) by the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh, which had purchased the painting in 1925 from the English collector Michael Sadler for £1150.<sup>1</sup> For many years, Umberto Eco had been advocating a new conception of the museum, organized around a single masterpiece surrounded by works and documents meant to visualize its cultural context and illuminate its sources, its genesis, and its influence; so far, he had only been able to realize this 'ideal museum' in the time-limited form of a temporary exhibition devoted to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* on the occasion of the Europalia Italia 2003.<sup>2</sup> The project entrusted by the National Gallery of Scotland to Belinda Thomson did not spring from the same theoretical premises, but it provided nonetheless an experiment along the same lines.

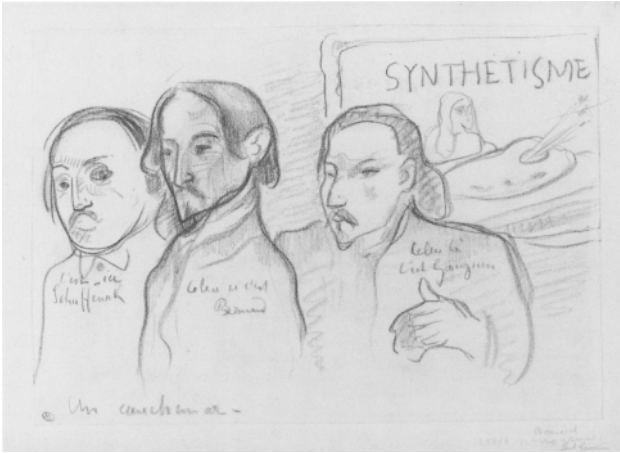
The show was divided into five sections: 'Artists and Brittany', 'Gauguin and his peers', 'Around *Vision of the sermon*', 'The theme of Jacob and the Angel', and

'The impact and legacy of *Vision of the sermon*'.<sup>3</sup> The fact that its topic was a work included in the exhibition gave it a rare coherence and concentration. On the other hand, such a quintessentially monographic format runs the risk of relegating the paintings included for comparison to the level of documentary material, and of exchanging the multifarious connections that arise between original artworks in three-dimensional space for a one-dimensional discursive chain – an illustrated essay displayed on the walls. The organizers of *Gauguin's vision* avoided this risk masterfully and created a show that was aesthetically as well as intellectually stimulating. While logically situated at its centre in terms of space and time (of the visit), *Vision of the sermon* featured both as a painting among all paintings (and graphic works), and as the sun around which all exhibits revolved.

Beyond the eighty years of its presence in Scotland, Gauguin's painting owed this unusual tribute to its power of attraction, its fame, and its standing in the history of art. The painter himself and his contemporaries had recognized from the start that something had changed with *Vision of the sermon*. Gauguin did not send the canvas to his dealer Theo van Gogh by mail, as he was wont, but asked his younger colleague Emile Bernard to take it with him to Paris.<sup>4</sup> He requested for it one of his highest prices and sold it, albeit not until 1891, at the auction he organized at the Hôtel Drouot to fund his trip to Tahiti. Shortly before the sale, in a highly influential article, the young critic Albert Aurier had given a detailed description of *Vision of the sermon* as proof that there existed in the visual arts a movement turning its back on impressionism and paralleling literary symbolism.<sup>5</sup> The complexity and fecundity of this painting may be further proven by the fact that even after the Edinburgh show and the papers delivered on its occasion, new aspects can still be discovered in it.

### Painting as wrestling

From Aurier onwards, a veritable change of paradigm was attributed to *Vision of the sermon*, replacing the more or less realistic depiction of exterior, optical realities with the ambiguous suggestion of dreams and visions. In the late 1880s, an ambivalent and even explosive mix of solidarity and competition reigned among the artists who could lay claim to such a revolution and whose fame and success depended not, as previously, on state-controlled institutions but on the free market and public opinion, that is, in the first instance, on dealers and critics.<sup>6</sup> To the lasting outrage of Emile Bernard, Aurier mentioned neither this young artist's role nor the term '*synthétisme*' in his programmatic article but hailed Gauguin as the chief representative and the leader of 'symbolism in painting'. In an undated drawing referring to this situation as a 'nightmare' (ill. 2), Bernard gave himself pride of place but showed a malevolent-looking Gauguin standing in front of an



2. Emile Bernard,  
*A nightmare-synthetism*,  
 c. 1888, black crayon on  
 paper, 18.3 × 26.8 cm.  
 Musée du Louvre,  
 département des Arts  
 graphiques, Paris

allegory of synthetist painting, attracting the viewer's attention with his hand. The Edinburgh exhibition made it possible to compare Gauguin's epochal painting with contemporary works by Bernard and especially with his *Breton women in the meadow* (ill. 1), a painting given to the artist by Gauguin and to which *Vision of the sermon* can be seen as an emulous response. Although the outcome of such a confrontation necessarily entails a historic interpretation and an aesthetic evaluation, most commentators seemed to agree that paying justice to Bernard's contribution diminished in no way the breakthrough represented by Gauguin's painting.

Several reasons have been given for Gauguin's choice of the biblical episode in which the shepherd Jacob encounters an unknown opponent, against whom he fights all night, until at dawn, struck at the hip, he submits to the Angel, recognizes its divine nature, and receives its blessing.<sup>7</sup> Among these reasons are the inclusion of wrestling bouts in the *Pardons* (religious festivals) of Brittany; homage to Delacroix's famous mural in the church of Saint-Sulpice; and Gauguin's contemporary meditation upon Victor Hugo's description of Jean Valjean's conversion in *Les misérables* as a 'vision' re-enacting the biblical struggle.<sup>8</sup> Yet another motive and allusion may have been the agonistic nature of the interaction among 'independent artists'. Both Bernard and Van Gogh objected to this and dreamed of a collective endeavour free from any striving toward supremacy, for instance within an 'association of anonyms', while Maurice Denis, a few years later, would depict Jacob and the Angel engaged in a sort of dance, harmonious and devoid of violence or even tension (ill. 3).<sup>9</sup> But Gauguin, on the contrary, seems to have relished competition and the fight for leadership. In Pont-Aven, a village visited in the summer by hundreds of painters from many countries, he enjoyed a reputation as an uncompromising avant-gardist and was happy to 'convert' young artists hitherto faithful to their traditions. *Vision of the sermon* significantly gives a



hierarchic view of the two protagonists: the Angel seems to contain easily the bearded Jacob's efforts and forces him into an attitude of submission, with the head lower than the waist. One may suspect that despite his identification with Jean Valjean in the self-portrait he was painting for Van Gogh (ill. 4), and contrary to Delacroix and most painters of this theme, Gauguin sympathized as much with the Angel as with Jacob – as well as, in a different way, with the priest to whom he seems to have given his own features.<sup>10</sup>

With his Prussian blue garment and his golden wings, Gauguin's Angel embodies the message of the painting and announces the superiority of the mind's eye over the eyes of the body. That Gauguin did not shy from endowing his self-representations – in earnest or in jest – with signs of the sacred is well known. In 1889, he would depict himself as Christ in *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (Norton





3. Maurice Denis, *Jacob wrestling with the Angel*, 1893, oil on canvas, 48 × 36 cm. Private collection

4. Paul Gauguin, *Self-portrait with portrait of Bernard (Les misérables)*, 1888, oil on canvas, 45 × 55 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; W 239/WN 309

Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach; W326) and give a halo to the self-portrait included in the decoration of Marie Henry's inn in Le Pouldu (see p. 90, ill. 2). Such identifications with the divine, in triumphant or suffering mode, had an art-theoretical as well as a psychological dimension. On 14 August 1888, Gauguin had written to Emile Schuffenecker: 'Art is an abstraction, draw it from nature by dreaming in front of her and rather think of the creation that will result from it, it is the only way of ascending toward God, by doing as our Divine Master, creating.'<sup>11</sup> At the end of 1889, in a comment on Joris-Karl Huysmans's collection of critical essays *Certains*, he would refer more clearly to the romantic notion that artists are meant to create like nature rather than after nature, by writing that artists are one of nature's means of varying her productions and that Odilon Redon was 'one of those it has chosen for this continuation of creation'.<sup>12</sup>

## Religions and apparitions

Although anteceded by many art-theoretical utterances from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, this could sound blasphemous, and we know that when Gauguin tried to donate *Vision of the sermon* to a local church, it was rejected by the priest on the ground that it was not a religious painting.<sup>13</sup> The enthusiastically devout Bernard would also question the depth and sincerity of Gauguin's Christian faith. The depiction of religious practices was in fact a popular subject for genre and Salon painters, especially when located in a rural setting like Brittany and thus doubly exotic for sceptical Parisians. The Edinburgh exhibition provided ample material for comparison with pictures of praying Breton women in traditional costume and showed that Gauguin's painting distinguished itself from these in two ways: because of its 'synthetic', strongly anti-realistic style, and because it added to the depiction of believers an evocation of their religious experience, their 'vision'.

Fred Leeman observed rightly during the Edinburgh conference that in comparison with Bernard's (slightly later) pictures of Christian subjects, Gauguin had painted *Vision of the sermon* 'one step removed' and with an attitude akin to that of an anthropologist. One could indeed speak of 'participant observation' in relation with Gauguin's attitude, in Brittany and later in the South Seas. He refused to distinguish and hierarchize between 'religion', 'faith' or 'piety' on the one hand, and 'superstition' or 'idolatry' on the other hand. Among his reasons for staying and painting in Brittany was the fact that in this peripheral and deeply traditionalist part of France and of Europe, daily life was still permeated with religion and Catholicism with pre-Christian elements. In other words, the 'disenchantment of the world' that Max Weber would diagnose as a distinguishing feature of Western culture was not or not yet completed there, a situation that appealed equally to the younger artists inspired by Gauguin's example who would soon call themselves 'Nabis' (Hebrew for 'prophets') and sometime stay or go back to Brittany for the rest of their lives. The same attraction obviously emanated from Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, even though, as Gauguin would find out, the impact of colonization and christianization made the search for living traces of the local religion and culture an almost desperate endeavour. This continuity in Gauguin's efforts made one particularly appreciate the fact that the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo had agreed to lend *Mana'o tupapa'u* ('The spirit of the dead watches') to the National Galleries of Scotland, since this painting (ill. 5) can be regarded as a new elaboration of the *Vision of the sermon* theme in the Tahitian context.

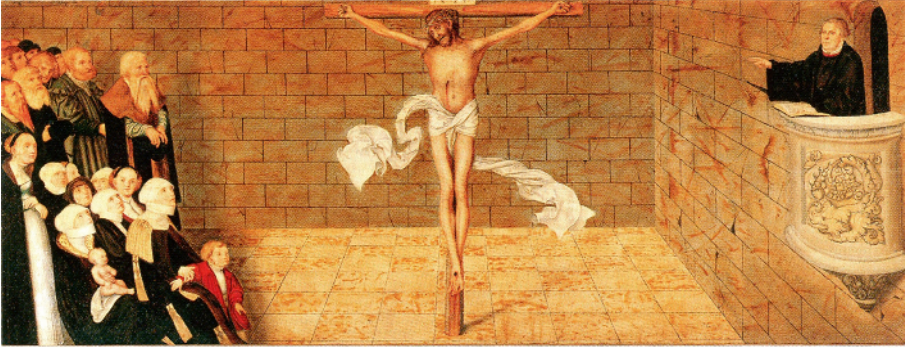
In both pictures, the women depicted experience a supernatural presence or event – Jacob's wrestling with the Angel in one case, the spirit of the dead in the other – that corresponds to their culturally determined expectations and takes a form – a cow here (we shall come back to this point), an old woman there – familiar





5. Paul Gauguin, *Mana'o tupapa'u*, 1892, oil on burlap mounted on canvas, 72.4 × 97.5 cm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, A. Conger Goodyear Collection, 1965; W 457

to them from daily life. This comparison can lead to the conclusion that *Vision of the sermon* is not so much about a specifically Christian tradition as about something more general and fundamental: an 'apparition', a mental image, an inner event. Gauguin had indeed first thought of calling the painting 'Apparition'.<sup>14</sup> Seen in this way, *Vision of the sermon* can be put in a broader context and compared with other artistic precedents absent from the Edinburgh exhibition and catalogue. On the predella of Lucas Cranach's *Wittenberg altarpiece* (ill. 6), for instance, an oversized Christ on the cross stands in the empty post-Reformation church, between the parishioners gathered on the left and Luther speaking to them from the pulpit: as Joseph Leo Koerner has pointed out, it represents neither a crucifix nor the Crucifixion but the apparition of the crucified in the mind of the listeners and of the painter himself as a result of Luther's sermon.<sup>15</sup> In a more implicit but equally effective way, the nude woman lying on a cloud of white sheet in Cézanne's *A modern Olympia* (ill. 7) is not the real-life prostitute gazing directly at the viewer from Manet's painting (1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), but rather an erotic fantasy



6. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Luther preaching to the Wittenberg congregation*, predella of the Wittenberg altarpiece, 1547, oil on panel. Stadtkirche, Wittenberg

floating in an undetermined space as on a screen. Among the means used by Cézanne to achieve this ontological transformation is the inclusion of a spectator resembling himself in an inferior, upward-looking position, similar to the one of the Breton women in *Vision of the sermon*. This additional 'level of unreality' – to use the phrase coined by Sven Sandström for Renaissance wall painting –, this insistence on the fictional character of pictorial representation and its affinity with daydreaming were probably part of what made this 'Olympia' *modern* for Cézanne, and certainly for his viewers. Gauguin may have meditated upon the twist it gave to a painting that he greatly admired and consciously emulated in *Mana'o tupapa'u*, amused also by the corroborating fact that a female visitor to his hut in Tahiti had interpreted a reproduction of *Olympia* as a photograph of his French wife.<sup>16</sup>

#### Misperception and cognition

*Vision of the sermon* therefore deserves its paradigmatic status also in that it is a self-reflexive work dealing in visual terms with issues of perception, cognition and representation. *Vision* in French means both the sensory perception of visual reality and the inner or transcendental experience of an image. In his 1970 book *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the impressionist circle*, Mark Roskill proposed an interpretation of *Vision of the sermon* that has not received the attention it deserves. He noticed that a resemblance connects the cow and the pair of wrestlers across the tree dividing the upper part of the painting. The four legs (or, more probably, the three legs and the tail) of the cow parallel in particular the four legs of the two opponents (and the 'tail' of Jacob's garment); the general shapes also echo each other, as Jacob's straightened left leg and starkly bent back echo the cow's hind portion and



7. Paul Cézanne, *A modern Olympia*, c. 1873-74, oil on canvas, 46 × 55.5 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

back.<sup>17</sup> In fact, one could argue that Jacob and the Angel form an approximate version of the cow obtained by symmetrical inversion, enlarged and complemented in the upper part by the Angel's bust and golden wings. On the basis of this resemblance, Roskill argued that Gauguin's composition may have been meant to suggest the following scenario: after listening to the priest's sermon – the painting has often been called *Vision after the sermon* – the Breton women go out of the church and, as they encounter a cow 'rearing up', they imagine, or rather they *see* the fight between Jacob and the Angel of which they have just heard.<sup>18</sup>

This was a daring proposal and it may be the reason why it was silently discarded. However, it is far from absurd. The additions I just made to Roskill's observations give a supplementary, morphogenetic argument: the symmetrical metamorphosis of the cow into the wrestling pair would aptly visualize the psychological associative phenomenon by which the parishioners transform the one into the other. This association is not only based on visual analogy, but on semantic

proximity as well. Denise Delouche has called attention to the inclusion of wrestling bouts in the *Pardons* and shown that the prize intended for the winner could be a kid goat, a ram or occasionally a heifer, kept bound to a tree or a pole during the contest.<sup>19</sup> A lamb is thus in evidence in Adolphe Leleux's painting *Festival in Cornwall* (1864, Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires, Paris), demurely watching the ongoing fight.<sup>20</sup> Gauguin's cow, on the contrary, is depicted in movement, and can be seen as trying to free itself from a bondage visually expressed by the way in which the tree trunk crops its muzzle. This interpretation is in line with the Breton tradition mentioned by Delouche, so that in the narrative scenario sketched by Roskill, the imaginative transformation of the cow into the wrestling pair could have been triggered not only by an analogy of outline – the aspect that the flat surface of the painting can best transmit – but also by a kinetic and kinaesthetic analogy between the rebellious cow and Jacob trying vainly to free himself from the supernatural grip of the Angel.

Another, more profound reason to take Roskill's hypothesis seriously is the fact that Gauguin had a personal and artistic interest in 'hallucinations', misperceptions and dream images, which had found an expression many years before *Vision of the sermon*. As early as 1881, he had painted his daughter Aline sleeping (*The little dreamer*, Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen; W 52, 54/WN 75) before a background that can be understood as representing a wallpaper but clearly suggests the oneiric or 'hypnagogic' images going through her mind.<sup>21</sup> In Brittany, Gauguin was fascinated by the cliffs and the rocks into which natural and supernatural figures had been seen from time immemorial.<sup>22</sup> Such phenomena were of great interest to the philosophers, psychologists and psychophysiologists who were investigating the workings of the human mind and whose research reached a broad public by way of popular scientific articles. In his classic *Le sommeil et les rêves* first published in 1861, Alfred Maury emphasized the affinities existing between dreams, 'hypnagogic' images (perceived between sleep and waking state), and misperceptions, that is situations in which incomplete or ambiguous visual data are wrongly interpreted, completed or transformed by the mind, leading it to erroneous identifications. Such misinterpretations, he argued, arise not only from specific stimuli but depend also on the perceiving subject, on his or her cultural background and emotional state. He thus mentioned 'superstition' as a factor conducive to misperceptions, as when 'we transform in the night some tree, some ruined, oddly shaped wall, illuminated by the moonlight, into ghosts, spectres, and thieves', and he recalled 'an old female servant, prone to hypnagogic hallucinations, who feared the ugly creatures she saw so much that she constantly kept a light close to her bed'.<sup>23</sup> The strong resemblance of these passages with the situations depicted in *Vision of the sermon* and in *Mana'o tupapa'u* need not reveal a causal relationship, but their similarity strengthens Roskill's hypothesis and confirms that the Christian 'apparition' of Jacob and the Angel should be seen above all as the pictorial evocation of a type of experience

blurring the distinction between sensory perception and imagination. In his treatise *De l'intelligence* first published in 1870, Hippolyte Taine had used a provocative and much-quoted phrase to question this very distinction and emphasize the cognitive dimension of sensory perception: 'Our exterior perception is thus an inner dream that happens to be in harmony with the exterior world; and, rather than saying that hallucination is a wrongful exterior perception, we should say that exterior perception is a *truthful hallucination*.'<sup>24</sup>

### Suggestions

When Gauguin wrote to Schuffenecker that 'art is an abstraction', he clearly did not use the term in the sense of twentieth-century non-objective art, that is – at least according to part of the corresponding art theory, criticism and history – in the sense of a principled rejection and exclusion of mimetic reference to, and association with, visual reality. The phrase 'draw it from nature' that follows indicates that he meant it in the etymological and 'synthetist' sense of a drastic selection among the visual properties of the natural model, and of a reduction of the formal means employed by the artist. What finally comes next, 'draw it from nature by dreaming in front of her', confirms the coexistence of abstraction and the reference to nature for Gauguin and goes further by drawing a parallel between the artist's creative attitude toward the natural model and the kind of psychophysiological situations depicted in *Vision of the sermon* and *Mana'o tupapa'u*: the painter, like the Breton women coming out of church and Teha'amana surrounded by darkness, should 'dream' in front of nature and thereby reconcile 'exterior perception' and 'hallucination'. One may surmise that the viewers of the resulting work of art should do the same and that Gauguin encourages them to mobilize their associative abilities and to open themselves to the 'potential images' that the formal abstraction of the painting does not dismiss, but contributes to multiplying.<sup>25</sup> Such a call for an active recipient agrees not only with statements and other works by Gauguin and related artists, it is also congruent with the aesthetics of 'suggestion' practised and theorized by the symbolist poets, of which Aurier found a pictorial equivalent in Gauguin's work and specifically in *Vision of the sermon*. It may amount to a challenge for art historians used to seeing a contradiction between the subjectivity of perception and the objectivity of scholarship, but this is a challenge that can and must be met.<sup>26</sup>

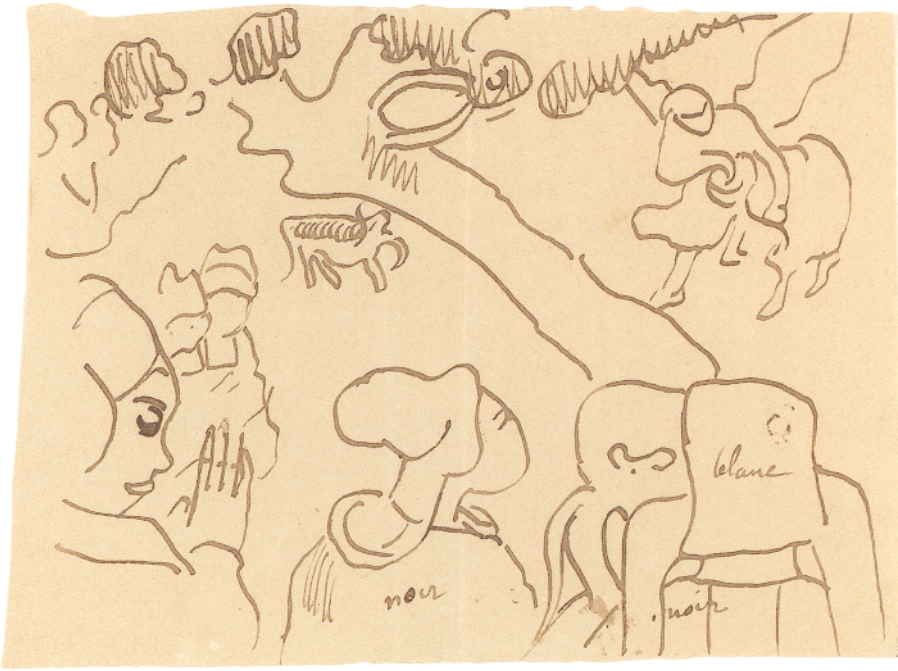
If one considers the painting neither as a (simplified) mimetic representation only nor as pure 'decoration', then formal traits can indeed 'appear' that do not belong to the representational level of explicit iconography but are susceptible of an iconic interpretation and are consistent with the semantic structure of the painting as a whole. This is the case of an eye shape present twice in *Vision of the*

*sermon*, along the oblique axis constituted by the tree. In the upper part, two strangely situated twigs of the tree join themselves shortly after departing from the trunk, thus forming an almond shape reminiscent of an eye. Although a conveniently placed group of leaves prevents us from seeing if they actually join or more plausibly cross each other, the configuration is botanically illogical. It may have been inspired at least partly, like the wrestling pair on the other side of the tree, by a Japanese print, namely by No. 89 of Hiroshige's *One hundred views of famous places in Edo*, *The moon pine at Ueno*, in which a branch oddly forms a circle and frames a portion of the cityscape seen in the distance. In Gauguin's painting, the 'eye' made of branches does not open onto a meaningful fragment of the background but it points toward the side of the 'vision', rhyming in addition with the Angel's wings.

The other eye shape is located directly beneath (or in front of) the base of the trunk, on one of the women's traditional *coiffes*.<sup>27</sup> Even more than Bernard, who does not appear to have ever used them to such purposes, Gauguin was fascinated by the decorative qualities of this element of the local costumes and, we may add, by their suggestive potential. In the letter in which he described *Vision of the sermon* to Van Gogh, he aptly compared the two last *coiffes* on the right with *casques monstrueux*, 'monstrous helmets', thus expressing his valuation of their associative power.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the second *coiffe* from the right, he might as well have spoken of *masque* (mask), since a sort of symmetrical knot suggests a pair of eyes turned toward the spectator.<sup>29</sup> These eyes too are blank, however, and the resulting gaze is blind. Strategically placed at the foot of the tree separating the terrestrial from the divine realm or the immanent from the transcendent one, this blind gaze mediates between the two, and, more specifically, between the woman on its left, who does not appear to see the wrestlers despite her open eyes, and the closed eyes of the women on the far left, of the two figures seen from behind, and of the priest on the far right. In other words, it visualizes, on an abstract level and with suggestive means, the closing of the bodily eyes that accompanies or enables the opening of the 'mind's' or spiritual eye. The design of this pair of 'eyes' supports in detail this mediating function: on the left, the eye shape is left open, with the arabesques of the 'wing' and ribbon echoing the other ribbon meandering across the shoulder of the woman with the open eyes; on the right, the eye shape is closed, like the one on top of the tree, chiming with the closed eyes of the woman and man on both extremities of the picture. The relevance of these two eye shapes and of the parallelism between the cow and the wrestling pair is confirmed by their inclusion in the further abstracted and highly selective sketch of the painting sent by Gauguin to Van Gogh (ill. 8).

These 'eyes' are potential images, in the sense that they are potentially present in the painting as a result of the artist's action but depend on the beholder's participation to become actual, to be fully images. They can also be called 'aspects'





8. Paul Gauguin, sketch of *Vision of the sermon*, pen and ink on paper, 11.7 × 15.5 cm, accompanying a letter to Vincent van Gogh written on or about 26 September 1888. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

in the sense used by Odilon Redon in his 1902 definition of the ‘sense of mystery’ and by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical investigations*, that is to define one way – among others – to see *and* interpret a given picture or detail of a picture.<sup>30</sup> Redon’s text concludes by making of this passage from potential to actual an ‘apparition’: ‘The sense of mystery consists in a continuous ambiguity, in double and triple aspects, hints of aspects (images within images), forms about to exist or existing according to the beholder’s state of mind. All things more than suggestive, since they appear.’<sup>31</sup> Although *Vision of the sermon* was painted long before this formulation, Gauguin’s bold step was probably informed to some extent by Redon’s art and art theory, which had been taking shape for several decades – one need only think of the programmatic title of his first album of lithographs, *In dreams* (‘Dans le rêve’), published in 1879. Conversely, the closed eyes of Gauguin’s Breton women would soon find an echo in a key composition in Redon’s oeuvre, *Closed eyes* (‘Yeux clos’), of which the older artist produced several painted versions and a lithographic one from 1889 onwards.<sup>32</sup>



One generally assumes that Redon and Gauguin met on the occasion of their participation in the eighth and last impressionist exhibition in 1886. That Gauguin was at least aware of Redon's production and interested in it prior to this date is proven by an 1885 painting carrying the inscription 'The Unintelligible / with a hard profile' (ill. 9), deriving from the last plate of the lithographic album *Homage to Goya* published in the same year (ill. 10). How important Redon's example was for Gauguin, and how consonant with the issues raised in *Vision of the sermon*, appears most clearly in the 1889 text already mentioned. In order to exemplify the way in which Redon's art acted as a 'continuation of nature', Gauguin described a work that he did not name but which may have been the second plate from the 1886 album *Night, The man was alone in a night landscape*: 'Amid a black atmosphere, we finally make out one tree trunk, then two; one of them is surmounted by something, probably a man's head. With utmost logic he leaves us in doubt as to that existence. Is it truly a man or, rather, a vague resemblance? However that may be, they both live on this page and, inseparable from one another, they weather the same storms.'<sup>33</sup> Gauguin therefore locates the consonance between Redon's art and the working of nature in its emulation of misperception and stimulation of the beholder's imaginative response.



9. Paul Gauguin,  
*The Unintelligible /*  
*with a hard profile*, 1885,  
oil on canvas, 42 × 40 cm.  
Present whereabouts  
unknown; W 139

10. Odilon Redon,  
*Upon waking, I saw the*  
*GODDESS of the*  
*INTELLIGIBLE*, with her  
severe and hard profile,  
plate VI from the album  
*Homage to Goya*, 1885,  
lithograph, 27.6 × 21.7 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum,  
Otterlo



Among the many reviewers of Redon's album *Homage to Goya* was Charles Morice, who would become Gauguin's closest critical associate. Since the caption of its first plate began with the words 'In my dream' and Joris-Karl Huysmans had published simultaneously a 'literary transposition' of the album narrating a nightmare, Morice felt prompted to define what should be understood under 'dream' in Redon's case: 'Monsieur Redon's dream ... Let us understand one another! The meaning that must also be given to the word "dream" is neither the common, prosaic one (involuntary visions in sleep) nor the rare, poetic one (voluntary visions when awake), it is both the former and the latter, it is both waking and sleeping, it is, properly speaking, the dream of a dream: the voluntary ordering of involuntary visions.'<sup>34</sup> Redon was so pleased with this explanation that he inscribed a gift copy of the album with the words '... le rêve d'un rêve...'.<sup>35</sup> It had indeed the merit of distinguishing between the 'vision' represented and the representation of the 'vision', thereby using the ambiguous term 'vision' to mediate between the two. One could thus easily adapt it to Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* and hope that the result would equally please the artist and do justice to the complexity of his work: namely, that this depiction and evocation of an apparition confronts us not only with a vision, but with the 'vision of a vision'.

## NOTES

A first version of this essay was published as 'Die Vision einer Vision: Gauguins "Vision der Predigt" in neuem Licht' in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23-24 April 2006, pp. 65-66. This revised and expanded version is part of a project for a book-length study provisionally entitled *Gauguin and the 'Mysterious Centre of Thought'*.

1. Exhibition, *Gauguin's vision*, held at the Royal Scottish Academy Building from 6 July to 2 October 2005; Belinda Thomson, exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, Edinburgh (National Galleries of Scotland) 2005; conference, *Gauguin's 'Vision of the sermon': Interpretation, reception, conservation*, 30 September–1 October 2005, Edinburgh. The essays by Judith Simpson, Rodolphe Rapetti and Elise Eckermann published here are based on papers given at this conference.

2. See Omar Calabrese (ed.), exhib. cat. *Vénus dévoilée: La Vénus d'Urbino du Titien*, Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts) 2003.

3. See the exhibition checklist in exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, pp. 121-27.

4. For a gathering of the relevant biographical information, documents and bibliography, see the entry by Sylvie Crussard on *Vision of the sermon* in Daniel Wildenstein, *Gauguin: Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'œuvre peint (1873-1888)*, 2 vols., Paris & Milan 2001, vol. 2, no. 308, pp. 455-77.

5. G.-Albert Aurier, 'Le symbolisme en peinture. Paul Gauguin', *Mercur de France* 18, no. 15 (March 1891), pp. 155-65; reprinted in Albert Aurier, *Textes critiques 1889-1892: De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*, Paris 1995, pp. 26-39.

6. See Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and careers: Institutional change in the French painting world*, rev. ed., Chicago & London 1993 [1965].

7. Genesis, 32: 25-32.

8. See Wildenstein, *Catalogue de l'œuvre peint*, vol. 2, p. 456; Victor Merlhès (ed.), *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: Documents*,

*témoignages*, vol. 1: 1873-1888, Paris 1984, pp. 92-95.

9. See Emile Bernard's letter of 19 January 1891 to Emile Schuffenecker in Henri Dorra, 'Extraits de la correspondance d'Emile Bernard des débuts à la Rose-Croix (1876-1892)', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, December 1980, pp. 235-42, p. 238; Patricia Mathews, 'Aurier and Van Gogh: Criticism and response', *Art Bulletin* 48 (1986), pp. 94-104; Dario Gamboni, "'Of Oneself", "To Oneself": Symbolism, individualism and communication', in exhib. cat. *Lost paradise: Symbolist Europe*, Montreal (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) 1995, pp. 242-50.

10. See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Gauguin's religious themes*, New York & London 1985, pp. 18-32, and exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, p. 55. Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers have already suggested placing *Vision of the sermon*, including its emulation of Delacroix, in the context of Gauguin's 'creative competition' with Van Gogh. Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, exhib. cat. *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The studio of the south*, Chicago (Art Institute) and Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2001-2, p. 137.

11. 'L'art est une abstraction tirez-la de la nature en rêvant devant et pensez plus à la création qui résultera, c'est le seul moyen de monter vers Dieu en faisant comme notre Divin Maître, créer.' Merlhès, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, letter 47, p. 134.

12. 'La nature a des infinis mystérieux, une puissance d'imagination... elle se manifeste en variant toujours ses productions. L'artiste lui-même est un de ses moyens et, pour moi, Odilon Redon est un de ses élus pour cette continuation de création. [...] Jean Loize, 'Un inédit de Gauguin', *Nouvelles littéraires*, 7 May 1953, partly reprinted in Paul Gauguin, *Oviri: Ecrits d'un sauvage*, Paris 1974, pp. 59-61, p. 60.

13. See Wildenstein, *Catalogue de l'œuvre peint*, vol. 2, p. 469, and exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, pp. 68-70.

14. Wildenstein, *Catalogue de l'œuvre peint*, vol. 2, p. 456.

15. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *The reformation of the image*, London 2004, pp. 248-51.

16. Noa Noa: *Gauguin's Tahiti*, ed. Nicholas Wadley, trans. Jonathan Griffin, Oxford 1985, p. 21. Gauguin had copied Manet's *Olympia* in February 1891; see Dario Gamboni, 'Paul Gauguin's Genesis of a picture: A painter's manifesto and self-analysis', in *19th-Century Art*

Worldwide, autumn 2003, [http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn\\_03/articles/gamb. html](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_03/articles/gamb. html).

17. Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the impressionist circle*, Greenwich, Conn., 1970, pp. 104-5 ('The suggestion seems to be that the four legs and horns of a cow have been transformed by the peasant imagination into the shapes of the struggle itself.'). The possible derivation of this motif from Hokusai's sketches of wrestlers is no objection to this observation: Gauguin may have been interested precisely by the way in which some of these sketches give the impression that the two fighters form one four-legged creature. See Yves Thirion, 'L'influence de l'estampe japonaise dans l'œuvre de Gauguin', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, January-April 1956, pp. 101-4; Amishai-Maisels, *Gauguin's Religious Themes*; Wildenstein, *Catalogue de l'œuvre peint*, vol. 2, pp. 456-57; exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, pp. 43-44.
18. Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the impressionist circle*, Greenwich, Conn., 1970, pp. 104-5. Gauguin wrote in his letter to Van Gogh that the cow was 'rearing up'. Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 165, p. 232.
19. Denise Delouche, 'Gauguin et le thème de la lutte', in Musée d'Orsay and Ecole du Louvre, *Gauguin: Actes du colloque Gauguin, Musée d'Orsay, 11-13 janvier 1989*, Paris 1991, pp. 157-71; see exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, pp. 67-68.
20. See reproduction in exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, p. 66.
21. See Charles Stuckey, 'Gauguin inside out', in Eric M. Zafran (ed.), exhib. cat. *Gauguin's Nirvana: Painters at Le Pouldu 1889-1890*, Hartford (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art) 2001, pp. 129-41; Dario Gamboni, *Potential images: Ambiguity and indeterminacy in modern art*, London 2002, p. 87.
22. See Gamboni, *Potential images*, pp. 87-88.
23. 'J'ai connu une vieille domestique, fort sujette aux hallucinations hypnagogiques, et à laquelle les vilaines figures qu'elle voyait faisaient tant de peur qu'elle tenait constamment près de son lit une lumière allumée. [...] Lorsque, sous l'influence de la superstition ou de la crainte, nous transformons la nuit en revenants, en spectres, en brigands, quelque arbre, quelque pan de mur en ruine et à forme insolite, qu'éclaire la clarté de la lune [...]' L.-F.-Alfred Maury, *Le sommeil et les rêves. Etudes psychologiques sur ces phénomènes et les divers*

états qui s'y rattachent suivies de recherches sur le développement de l'instinct et de l'intelligence dans leurs rapports avec le phénomène du sommeil, Paris 1878 [1862], pp. 66, 78-79.

24. 'Ainsi notre perception extérieure est un rêve du dedans qui se trouve en harmonie avec les choses du dehors; et, au lieu de dire que l'hallucination est une perception extérieure fausse, il faut dire que la perception extérieure est une *hallucination vraie*.' Hippolyte Taine, *De l'intelligence*, 2 vols., Paris 1883 [1870], vol. 2, p. 13.
25. See Gamboni, *Potential images*, pp. 18-20, 86-96.
26. On the methodological problems involved and the necessary precautions, see Dario Gamboni, 'Voir double: Théorie de l'image et méthodologie de l'interprétation', in Jean-Hubert Martin (ed.), exhib. cat. *Une image peut en cacher une autre. Arcimboldo – Dalí – Raetz*, Paris (Grand Palais) 2009, pp. xiv-xxv.
27. This (double) eye shape has been noted by D. H. Fraser, *Gauguin's 'Vision after the sermon'*, London 1969, p. 23, and discussed by James Kearns, *Symbolist landscapes: The place of painting in the poetry and criticism of Mallarmé and his circle*, London 1989, p. 7.
28. Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 165, p. 232. For details about the various headdresses depicted, see exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, pp. 29-30.
29. James Kearns mentioned 'faint but distinct elements of a head, part animal, part devil' in the centre of the last *coiffe* on the right, and interpreted their presence as part of an 'emergence towards Knowledge' that, for him, progresses from the right to the left and culminates in the woman with the eyes open (Kearns, *Symbolist landscapes*, p. 7). Although these elements are not as visible as the eye (and arguably the face) in the bush in the foreground of *Arlésiennes (Mistral)* (1888, Art Institute of Chicago; W 300; Druick and Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin*, p. 253; Gamboni, *Potential images*, pp. 88-89), they appear to be intentional and resemble the mask-like woman's face seen from the front, at mid height on the left side of *Vision of the sermon* (for a good reproduction of the detail, see exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, p. 76).
30. See Odilon Redon, *A soi-même: Journal (1867-1915)*. *Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes*, Paris 1961 [1922], p. 100; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus: Tagebücher*

1914-1916. *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Werkausgabe, I), Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 518-20, 525.

31. 'Le sens du mystère, c'est d'être tout le temps dans l'équivoque, dans les double, triple aspects, des soupçons d'aspect (images dans images), formes qui vont être, ou qui le seront selon l'état d'esprit du regardeur. Toutes choses plus que suggestives, puisqu'elles apparaissent.' Redon, *A soi-même*, p. 100.

32. See Alec Wildenstein, *Odilon Redon. Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992-98, vol. 1, nos. 467-478; Fred Leeman, 'Redon's spiritualism and the rise of mysticism', in Douglas Druick *et al.*, exhib. cat. *Odilon Redon: Prince of dreams 1840-1916*, Chicago (Art Institute), Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) & London (Royal Academy of Arts), pp. 215-36, p. 227.

33. 'Dans une atmosphère noire, on finit par apercevoir un, deux troncs d'arbres : l'un d'eux est surmonté de quelque chose, vraisemblablement une tête d'homme. Avec une logique extrême, il nous laisse le doute sur cette existence. Est-ce véritablement un homme ou plutôt une vague ressemblance ? Quoi qu'il en soit, ils vivent tous deux sur cette page, inséparables tous deux, supportant les mêmes orages.' Loize, 'Un inédit de Gauguin', p. 60. Trans. Eleanor Levieux in Paul Gauguin, *The writings of a savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin, New York 1978, p. 39.

34. 'Le rêve de M. Redon... Entendons-nous! L'acception qu'il faut aussi donner au mot Rêve n'est ni celle vulgaire et de prose (visions fatales du sommeil), ni celle rare et de poésie (visions volontaires de la veille); c'est ceci et cela, c'est la veille et le sommeil, c'est proprement le rêve d'un rêve: l'ordonnance volontaire de visions fatales.' Charles Morice, 'L'hommage à Goya', *Petite Tribune républicaine*, 2 April 1885; quoted in André Mellerio, *Odilon Redon*, New York 1968 [Paris 1913], pp. 133-34. See Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau. Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 110-50.

35. See Ted Gott, 'Silent messengers – Odilon Redon's dedicated lithographs and the "politics" of gift-giving', *Print Collector's Newsletter* 19, no. 3 (July-August 1988), pp. 92-101, p. 95.





1. Fernand Lochar, The Goncourts' house, 53 boulevard Montmorency, Auteuil, Paris (16e), Vestibule - [Japanese] kitchen wall arrangement, June 1886. Photograph on albumen paper. Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris

# **The décor of dreams: Gauguin, Aurier and the symbolists' vision**

Juliet Simpson

One of the most striking features of Paul Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* (see p. 6, ill. 1) is its intensely decorative character. But how exactly is this decorative quality, which is linked with dream and vision, fundamental to the painting's expression and meaning? Gauguin, as Jirat-Wasiutyński has pointed out,<sup>7</sup> hardly uses the term 'decoration', yet it was to be an animating principle of his work from the mid to late 1880s onwards. This development was also contemporary with a new significance accorded to decorative art, as well as with forms of expression emerging within literary symbolism of the period as a means of fusing inner and external realities, in giving material substance to dream. What I shall explore here is the interlinking of these two distinct areas, by highlighting, in particular, the role of the symbolist critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier, who promoted Gauguin as the exemplar of symbolism in art: one modelled on the suggestive and radical potential of the decorative.

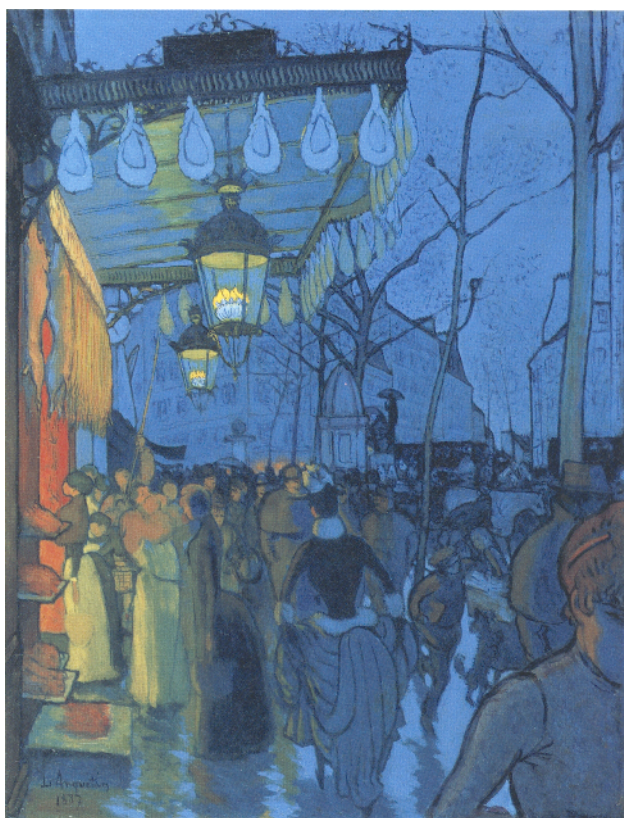
## A decorative aesthetic: Exoticism and the inner life

The association of ornament with the exotic and with dream has a long history in nineteenth-century French literature and aesthetics. Romantic writers were especially drawn to ornamental forms expressive of instability, altered reality, even nightmare, parallel to the experience of the Sublime. Both Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, for example, were fascinated with the grotesque; Charles Baudelaire was mesmerized by the 'beau bizarre' of Chinese art and ornament,<sup>2</sup> and with what he saw as the 'volupté' of the arabesque: 'the meanderings of your fantasy around your will'.<sup>3</sup> But by the late nineteenth century, interest in ornament and decoration was no longer confined principally to literature, nor focused mainly on ornamental motifs. It was an expanding and mainstream field of historical and cultural enquiry, fuelled by a series of key studies published during the 1870s and 1880s, notably by Jules Bourgoïn (1877); Charles Blanc (1882) and Félix Bracquemond (1885).<sup>4</sup> These – and others – helped to counter an increasingly negative linking of decoration with industrial manufacture, and to establish decorative art as a serious scholarly concern. Blanc's and Bracquemond's studies in particular mark a shift from a preoccupation with Middle Eastern art, which had dominated the mid-nineteenth century, to that of the Far East, especially Japanese art and decoration, and to pre-Renaissance European art. While Islamic art with its abstract and geometric patterns provided historians such as Bourgoïn and Blanc with a template of decorative principles that still united classical and non-classical visions, the Japanese *objet d'art*, with its synthesis of nature and artifice, offered a whole new way of looking at Western naturalist traditions. Albert Racinet's visual history of colour ornament refers, for example, to the 'freshness', variety and ingenious inventiveness of Japanese decorative forms.<sup>5</sup> In Edmond de Goncourt's view, this was a fusion of *force* – expression – with *fantaisie* – vision – that made it of peculiar relevance to tendencies in modern European literature and art.<sup>6</sup>

We need to view Gauguin's and his contemporaries' interest in decorative art as a response to this wider context of ideas and to two notable developments. First, by the time the *Vision of the sermon* was conceived and painted, Far Eastern art, in particular, was identified not only with exotic motifs or compositional novelties but with effects of ambiguity, metamorphosis and strangeness: effects embodied by its predominantly decorative aesthetic. Striking examples include the Goncourts' Japanese *décor*s for their 'artist's house' at Auteuil (ill. 1),<sup>7</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé's concern with creating a dream-like orientalism in his poetry of the period, merging verbal and visual *décor*s, and the shadow theatre that magnetized Parisian audiences during the 1880s and 1890s. Second, the Far Eastern decorative model also broadened the scope of contemporary interest in decorative art, especially among the younger artistic avant-garde. On one hand, this took the form of a more globalizing concept of decoration as the basis and end of all art, uniting Middle and Far Eastern



paradigms as a source of rejuvenation for European fine art as well as decorative arts. Bracquemond – not an enthusiast for Japanese art – still encompassed it in his 1885 definition of decoration as ‘the life of the arts [...] their *raison d’être*’, with ornament as a structuring principle: ideas that surely shaped Gauguin’s efforts during his early experiments with ceramics in Bracquemond’s atelier in 1886.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, neglected Western traditions – of the Middle Ages, for example – could be as exotic as Japan. These too, like the inscrutable Far Eastern object, offered essentially symbolic, decorative transcriptions of reality, or forms of vision that dissolve boundaries between what we understand as abstract and figurative, observed nature and dream. In 1883, for example, Louis Gonse suggested parallels between the sculptures and decorative forms of ‘our cathedrals’ and certain ‘Japanese sculptures’ in their common ‘consistent subordination of detail to the logic of the whole’.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this characteristic also explains Bracquemond’s later disquiet at what he saw as Japanese art’s tendency to turn plastic representation into a form of ‘writing’.<sup>10</sup>



2. Louis Anquetin,  
*Avenue de Clichy: Five  
o'clock*, 1887,  
oil on canvas,  
69 × 53 cm.  
Wadsworth Atheneum,  
Hartford, Conn.,  
The Ella Gallup Sumner  
and Mary Catlin  
Sumner Collection Fund

Between 1886 and 1888, Emile Bernard, Louis Anquetin, Gauguin, Emile Schuffenecker and their immediate circle were all responding to an expanded sense of ornament and *décoration* as vehicles for expressing ambiguity, mystery and experiences beyond the bounds of the everyday here and now. But there are important differences. Belinda Thomson has stressed the dissimilarity in theme, iconography and treatment between the two landmark ‘synthetist’ works of 1888: Bernard’s *Breton women in the meadow* (see p. 10, ill. 1) and Gauguin’s *Vision of the sermon*.<sup>11</sup> I would argue that this difference also extends to the decorative principles informing them. Bernard’s and Anquetin’s Japonist and cloisonist experiments of 1886 to 1887, notably Anquetin’s *Avenue de Clichy: Five o’clock* (ill. 2) and Bernard’s *Iron bridges at Asnières* (ill. 3), create altered and stylized versions of a familiar reality – in effect, types of deformations close in spirit, if not style, to decadent literary subversions of contemporary modern-life themes and imagery, as in Maurice Rollinat’s 1883 *Les névroses*.



3. Emile Bernard, *Iron bridges at Asnières*, 1887, oil on canvas, 45.9×54.2 cm.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, Grace Rainey Rogers Fund; L 43

It is certainly this deforming, distorting, pattern-making aesthetic that we see emerging in Gauguin's work after 1887, probably in part influenced by Bernard alongside other sources of inspiration. But Gauguin's ornamental and decorative visual language does not just caricature or abstract from nature. In *Vision of the sermon* reality is extended or re-imagined, suggesting a visionary experience within, as well as outside, the realm of the present and known. Decorative elements are also deployed and combined in ways that increase and complicate their suggestive effects, despite apparent simplicities of form. The insistent arabesques describing the contours and line of praying women evoke both Baudelaire's figure symbolizing desire and dream and interlacing Islamic pattern, which Bracquemond had characterized as 'a kind of fantasy bordering on vertigo'.<sup>12</sup> To these are added compositional asymmetries, suppression of one-point perspective and, to some degree, modelling and non-naturalistic, saturated colour derived from Japanese prints and other types of objects. Gauguin, for example, may well have been looking at the sorts of objects – cloisonné ceramics, figurines or *netsuke*, the decorative bamboo pipes, *étuis* – much sought by collectors of the period (ill. 4),<sup>13</sup>



4. Plates from Louis Gonse, *L'Art Japonais*, 2 vols, 1883: Ivory *netsuke*, from the collection of Auguste Dreyfus; and Perfume, medicine bottles, pipe *étui*, *netsuke* and examples of lacquer, wood and ivory-ware, from the collection of Louis Gonse





5. Paul Gauguin, *Nirvana: Portrait of Meijer de Haan*, 1889, 79.6 × 51.7 cm.  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn., The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner  
Collection Fund; W 320

as well as graphic sources, for ways of suggesting a state of transition from nature to dream. The discontinuities of scale and strongly sculptural decorative forms evoke the inventive distortions of *netsuke*<sup>14</sup> and similar types of object as much as Western medieval art. *Netsuke* in particular was singled out by Gonse as the most developed expression of Japanese taste for invention and fantasy precisely for its suggestively condensed, stylized visual form: 'it is a world of the infinitesimally small of which the variety exceeds anything that could be imagined.'<sup>15</sup> And it was *netsuke* figures that stimulated Gonse's comparisons between certain types of Japanese and Western medieval art: ideas echoed in the series of grimacing and Japonized types that recur in Gauguin's work between 1888 and 1889 – evident in *Vision of the sermon* (in some of the kneeling women and the Angel's face) and repeatedly in his portrayals of Meijer de Haan, as in *Nirvana: Portrait of Meijer de Haan* (ill. 5), to suggest a conflation of both the spiritual and demonic.<sup>16</sup> Gauguin clearly expressed admiration for Japanese drawing techniques.<sup>17</sup> We should also bear in mind his experiments with ceramics, which from 1886 show an increasing and decorative integration of figures, forms and materials – strikingly demonstrated in his *Vase with female face and flowers* (ill. 6) – corresponding, as he asserted



6. Paul Gauguin, *Vase with female face and flowers*, 1886-87, Musée national de céramique, Sèvres; G 55

elsewhere, to *poésie*.<sup>18</sup> It is this sense of ambiguity, of a metamorphic reality – epitomized in the rebus-like shapes of the women’s *coiffes* (resembling ‘eyes’ in one case, in another figuring a demonic face,<sup>19</sup> or even, in that of the woman in profile, the ‘g’ of Gauguin’s abbreviated ‘Pgo’ signature) – that conflates a psychic and supernatural event, that is suggested in the *Vision*’s hybrid, yet synthetic decorative effects and structure. In fact, *Vision of the sermon* could be seen in terms of a decorative ‘total work’, a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a concept that shares affinities with innovations central to literary symbolism of the period.

#### Decorative principles of symbolism

Indeed, interest in decorative principles and forms became central to symbolist literary experiments (of the mid to late 1880s) for their potential to express interiority and to figure the *noumenal*: the otherworldly, the *unseen*. The theme is recurrent in Mallarmé’s writings, from the play of absence/presence around visual and linguistic ornament in his early *Sonnet-en-yx* (1868) to his conception of

illustration as *décor*, merging word and image in an endlessly suggestive ‘architecture’ (preface to *Les dieux antiques*, 1880), to the radical patterning of *Un coup de dés* (1898).<sup>20</sup> If Baudelaire’s undulating ‘thyrsus’ was a cipher for personal desire (for his *rêve* that might unlock infinity – his nirvana), Mallarmé provided a template for his younger symbolists in taking a totalizing approach to the decorative form. His is a sublimation of sensation within a word-image dynamic that occults, but liberates from reality in an empirical sense.

These ideas form core themes in the 1886 symbolist manifestos, particularly in Gustave Kahn’s, where they are subject to new variations, echoed later by Edouard Dujardin and, as we shall see, by Aurier. In fact, Kahn suggests a key role for decoration and a decorative type of literature in symbolism’s overthrow of naturalism, via the issue of musicality and a synaesthetic approach to the arts. ‘We reclaim for the novel the right to put rhythm into the phrase,’ asserts Kahn, ‘to accent speech: the tendency is towards a very mobile type of prose poem, with uneven rhythms according to the appearances, the movements [...] the simplicities of the Idea.’<sup>21</sup> Kahn’s idealism here is indebted to Baudelaire and Richard Wagner as well as to Mallarmé. But what is striking, and especially relevant for this discussion, is Kahn’s stress on the extent to which decorative tendencies will shape the new ‘symbolist’ literature – and (he envisages) other arts too, including painting – with its inner and transcendent Ideas. As well as being a Wagnerite, Kahn, like his contemporaries, was also interested in the expressive potential of line, stimulated by the example of Islamic and Japanese art. And these sources are invoked in the series of musical and visual metaphors that define the form of symbolist literature – ‘perpetual undulation of verse’; ‘very mobile prose, with uneven rhythms’; ‘interlacing of rhythms with the pulse of the Idea’<sup>22</sup> – all pointing to its fundamentally decorative purpose, to the aim of creating an expressive synthesis of word, music, image and movement figured by decorative art structurally as well as thematically. In short, for Kahn, the decorative form is the exemplary bearer of symbolist suggestiveness. It fuses nature and artifice in ways that evoke a dynamic entwining of dream with life (objective and subjective perception) – ‘the dream,’ as he claims, ‘being indistinguishable from life’.<sup>23</sup>

Kahn would develop these ideas in his influential, but divisive, model of free verse built around ideas of synthesis, which were modelled on the art of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and neo-impressionism. But it was Aurier who was to provide an explicit link between literary symbolist aims and new and experimental tendencies in the visual art of the period – specifically in the work of Gauguin and his circle – through an aesthetic of decorative stylization. In doing so, he also extended symbolist conceptions of decoration to encompass within it an awakened interest in the expressive force of so-called ‘primitive’ and archaic art.

Aurier's *Le symbolisme en peinture* and 'décoration'

In 1888, Aurier was a newcomer writer on the margins of the Wagnerite and Mallarmé groupings, but increasingly party to their ideas. He knew of Gauguin's art, initially through Bernard, and was clearly drawn to it despite his immature knowledge of contemporary art. In 1889, his own journal, *Le Moderniste illustré* published a brief positive comment on the Café Volpini show,<sup>24</sup> as well as short articles by Bernard and Gauguin (on the Exposition Universelle and ceramic art), and a selection of the Volpini zincographs featured in the August issue of *Le Moderniste*. But his promise of an article on 'this bold enterprise'<sup>25</sup> was delayed until March 1891. Why? Because by late 1889 *Le Moderniste* had ceased publication, probably for featuring too many images of scantily clad young women. In addition, Aurier's involvement with Alfred Vallette and the new symbolist *Mercur de France*, as well as his landmark articles on Van Gogh and Camille Pissarro in 1890, distracted him, and it was only in early 1891 that he finally turned back to Gauguin, at Bernard's increasingly frantic promptings. The gap, however, was probably necessary (and certainly to Gauguin's, if not Bernard's, advantage). By the time Aurier published *Le symbolisme en peinture*, he returned to Gauguin and Bernard with a maturing symbolist aesthetic and, crucially, with a developed knowledge of contemporary art through Pissarro's and Van Gogh's work, not just that of Puvis and academic art, i.e. Jean-Jacques Henner, as had been the case in 1889.<sup>26</sup> This acted as his bridgehead for linking literary and visual conceptions of synthesis in terms of an art that expressed mystery by a dynamic fusing of referential and non-referential elements – in other words, through the *unstable* (dynamic) syntheses of decorative forms.

These were not new ideas in 1891, but, as we have seen, they had acquired a developed significance in the emergent symbolist debates of 1886. In 1888, Dujardin (one of Kahn's circle) had compared Bernard's and Anquetin's 'cloisonist' style to the symbolic (i.e. decorative) character of 'primitive art'. Maurice Denis in 1890 called for a renewal of artistic language, rejecting literary complexities and modelled on ancient and present decorative art. He mentioned as precedents 'Egyptian paintings, Byzantine mosaics' and newer interests: 'kake-monos', types of frieze-like Japanese paintings on silk, much collected by Philippe Burty, Edmond de Goncourt and Gonse during the 1880s.<sup>27</sup> Aurier, too, linked a number of Van Gogh's paintings notably, *The sower* and *La berceuse* (both 1889) to simplifying, decorative tendencies past and present, explicitly to *imagerie d'Epinal*, for their 'very simple, popular, almost childlike painting',<sup>28</sup> and indirectly to Japanese art, which he doubtless knew through literary contacts and his visits to Julien Tanguy and Theo van Gogh. At this point Aurier did not show the range of Denis's knowledge. Yet in 1891, his response to Gauguin's art produced a far more complex and theoretical approach than either Dujardin's or Denis's to the

possibilities latent in the decorative form. For Aurier, decoration was not merely a means to distinguish between image and its 'character' (or expressive effect) as it was for Dujardin, or, as it was for Denis, an end in itself, but had come to represent a plastic analogue to thought in a subjective, archaic and transcendent sense.

Aurier promotes this idea in both the transpositional poem that opens his 1891 article, and in the discussion of Gauguin's *idéisme* – Aurier's coinage – that follows. First Aurier attempts to recreate the visual and psychological impact of Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* in textual and aural form. Poetic, decorative effects such as the fairy-tale like beginning – 'Far, very far, on a fabled hillside, where the earth is the colour of ruddy vermillion'<sup>29</sup> – distort time, scale and logic, and magnify perception, as do repetition and linguistic circularity, suggesting both a recursiveness associated with the folk tale and a *deformation* of reality through vision, which parallels effects of visual pattern and colour in Gauguin's painting.<sup>30</sup> These effects are further amplified by Aurier's synaesthetic linking of word and music. The repeated question-and-answer sequences, patterns of phrases and alliteration build to an incantatory climax around the image (verbal and aural) of an orating 'Voice'. On one level this is linked to the oratory of the priest figure in the far right corner of *Vision of the sermon*; but on another, it is a vocal bodying forth of 'dream' through timbre, intonation and rhythm, Aurier's poetic equivalents to Gauguin's mirroring play of form, shape and colour in the figures and their gestures and suggested in the pattern-making interstices between figures and ground. The 'poem' is in effect Aurier's homage to Gauguin's visual and decorative syncretism mediated by the innovations of symbolist poetry, chiefly via the synaesthetic ideals advocated by the Wagnerites in 1885 and 1886. But Aurier goes on to elaborate this analogy, defining *Vision of the sermon* as the incarnation of a new pictorial symbolism, with Gauguin as its leader, precisely because its visionary, symbolic theme is intimated by evocative means – *idea-ism*, not by description or illustration, in effect, forms of *idealism*. In this way Gauguin's symbolism is distinguished from realist and idealist traditions in art history, and is now openly associated with the literary programmes advocated by Jean Moréas, and particularly by Kahn, in 1886.

Yet Aurier also develops and extends their terms. While his reference to Gauguin's *idea-ism* have explicitly Platonist and Neoplatonist resonances, corroborated by allusions to the Alexandrines and the Swedenborgian doctrine of mystical correspondences, these too, are emphatically related to the role of decorative elements in Gauguin's work, especially in *Vision of the sermon* (alluded to in the transpositional poem), in what Aurier calls its 'signification idéique': that is, the suggestion of a complex interplay of internalized *and* transcendent vision. What is more, Aurier finds a key place for the main innovations of pictorial 'synthetism', although there is no mention here of Bernard – its plastic language of simplification, especially deformation and 'primitivizing' tendencies in the creation of the symbolist art-work. 'These directly significant characters (forms, lines, colours,



etc.),' asserts Aurier, 'the artist will always have the right to exaggerate, to deform, not only following his individual vision [...] but according to the needs of the Idea to be expressed.'<sup>31</sup> There are close parallels here with Kahn's vision of a literature, subjective in nature, but 'according to the appearances [...] the simplicities of the Idea', that expresses and transforms individual vision into primordial sign. But Aurier's allusion to a 'hallucinatory' kind of vision corresponds both with literary sources – symbolist interest in occult and esoteric writings – and also with newer, visually related concerns: the perceptual and psychological effects of decorative forms. In 1893, for example, Paul Souriau was to give 'hallucination' a very specific and expanded sense as 'vertigo of the imagination' produced by aesthetic contemplation ('contemplative hypnosis'<sup>32</sup>) comparable to the troubling state of hypnosis: troubling because both states occupy that cusp point where our notional sense of 'reality' is suspended and unbridled fantasy begins. What is more, building on themes broached as early as 1881, Souriau places decorative forms as pre-eminent stimuli for this disorientating, yet productive, sensory and mental 'vertigo': 'every illusion that can be represented in the play of the figurative imagination, we will see these commonly employed in decoration.'<sup>33</sup> This is best demonstrated in types of decoration – he singles out here certain antique ornaments, medieval grotesques, Chinese and above all Japanese art and ornament – that produce a 'visual transfiguration' through a play between different registers of reality ('constant ambiguity of vision') that, for Souriau, is also at the root of the creative act.<sup>34</sup> Whether or not Aurier (or indeed Gauguin) knew the ideas of Souriau that underpin his 1893 study, Aurier too makes a key association between Gauguin's decorative 'deformations' – a concept close to Souriau's 'hallucinations' – and the visionary subject, the 'Idea', which for all its biblical and Platonist resonance still has to accommodate the enigma of 'subjectivity'. While this again echoes Kahn, Aurier goes further, linking his 'subjectivity' to a language of decorative forms and types, as exemplified in Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon*, themselves suggestive not of harmony or ideal pattern, but of a productive instability of effects.

In the final part of his 1891 article Aurier introduces another dimension to his expanded literary aesthetic, in stressing how Gauguin's use of decorative visual forms is a synthesis of archaic and contemporary conceptions of symbolism as well as of decoration. The decorative form is thereby envisaged as a kind of *Ur-form* 'at once subjective, synthetic, symbolist and idea-ist'.<sup>35</sup> So by linking us to a primordial, but recoverable, creativity, decorative art also connects us to a 'primitive', i.e. more expressive, state of being, as, for Aurier, 'it is, moreover, in sum, identical to primitive art, as it was just such an art that was first crafted by the instinctive geniuses at the dawn of humanity.'<sup>36</sup> This construct of a unitary primitive ideal in some ways simply recapitulates an interest in the romantic exotic; yet once again Gauguin's work is also shown to derive its very force and expression from its



7. Paul Gauguin, *Be in love, and you will be happy*, polychrome woodcarving, 97 × 75 cm, 1889. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Arthur Tracy Cabot Fund; G 76

8. Paul Gauguin, *Be mysterious*, 1890, polychrome woodcarving, 73 × 90 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; G 87

tension – not just its union – of decorative effects, which is highlighted by the central place of deformation in communicating its symbolic, enigmatic character. This puts a very late nineteenth-century gloss on an old idea. It also gives Aurier a chance to place Gauguin's ceramics and carvings – he singles out the two bas-reliefs, *Be in love, and you will be happy* (ill. 7) and *Be mysterious* (ill. 8) for special mention here – within a broader perspective, which redresses the critical hostility that followed their exhibition and reception at the 1891 Brussels Salon des Vingt.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, Aurier emphasizes how subject and treatment form integrated visual vocabularies figuring not only the commingling of erotic desire and dream states, but their sensation and effect: 'the disturbing caresses of mystery', the expression of the point where dream and desire meet.<sup>38</sup>

We do not know what Gauguin thought about Aurier's article. But he must have been pleased with its avant-garde credentials. Although it cannot be viewed in isolation from other critical responses to Gauguin's art at this period, everything in Aurier's language and critical approach was designed to demolish rivals, to make a celebrity of himself – of his claims for symbolism in 1891 and his role in advancing them – as well as of Gauguin. But the results provoked bitter conflict and division amongst the avant-garde, especially on Bernard's part, as has been well documented, and Aurier's follow-up article, 'Les symbolistes' (1892), which



modified his claims for Gauguin as instigator of visual symbolism, did little to redress this.<sup>39</sup> Even so, 1891 marked a high-point in the extension of the symbolist effort to visual art, not least for Aurier's creation of a decorative paradigm as a means to grasp a very complex shift in representational practices of the period, away from metaphor and illustration to a grappling with the material and perceptual limits of expression itself. This helps to explain the draw of decorative forms, especially Far Eastern objects, which were fascinating not as inspirations for abstraction alone but for the instability of their mimetic – recognizable – and non-naturalist – decorative – elements. Indeed they suggested histories and uses that made them objects of mystery and inaccessibility to Western eyes, despite their representational elements. In a similar sense, Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* created an object not so much for devotion, but charged with the unknown; a total work without Wagner. Rather than being imitative, it contains its own referential network of ideas hidden within it. And it is this mystery of the non-referential, despite the ostensibly Christian-inspired theme, that is its radical embodiment of vision. Aurier recognized the singularity of *Vision of the sermon* even if he complicated its reception. His contribution, if controversial, was to highlight the resonance of its suggestive ideas within an expanded symbolist culture of the early 1890s.

## NOTES

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1. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutynski, *Technique and Meaning in Gauguin*, Cambridge 2000, p. 193.
2. Charles Baudelaire, 'Exposition Universelle de 1855', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. M. Ruff, Paris 1968; see pp. 363-64.
3. 'la promenade de votre fantaisie autour de votre volonté'. 'Le thyrsé' (XXXII, 'Le Spleen de Paris'), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris 1975, pp. 335-36.
4. Particularly Jules Bourgoïn, *Les éléments de l'art arabe: Le trait des entrelacs*, Paris 1879; Charles Blanc, 'Grammaire des arts décoratifs', serialized (in six instalments) in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1870-76; and Félix Bracquemond, *Du dessin et de la couleur*, Paris 1885.
5. Albert-Charles-Auguste Racinet, *L'ornement polychrome*; first 100 plates published by Firmin-Didot in ten instalments, 1869-73, and as a single volume, 1873; a further 120 plates (including many more examples of Far Eastern objects) were issued by the same publisher as *L'ornement polychrome – deuxième série*, 1885-87. The first series (not so-named until the publication of the second series) was published in English as *Polychrome ornament*, London 1873, and reprinted as *The encyclopedia of ornament* (text and plates), London 1988 (see p. 100 for the passage referred to here).
6. Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal*, ed. Robert Ricatte, vol. 2, Paris 1956, 22 January 1875, p. 612: a conjunction that informs the Goncourts' earliest interests in Japanese art as attested by a Journal entry for October 1863, which describes the *violence* and *fantaisie* of a Japanese *shunga* album recently acquired.
7. For a discussion of the Goncourts' interior design schemes at Auteuil, see Pamela J. Warner, 'Framing, symmetry and contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's aesthetic interior', *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15 (2008), pp. 36-54. I would like to thank the curators of the Fondation Custodia for kind permission to reproduce the photograph illustrated.
8. 'la vie des arts [...] leur raison d'être'. Félix Bracquemond, *Du dessin et de la couleur*, in *Bracquemond: Ecrits sur l'art*, ed. Pierre Sanchez, Dijon 2002, p. 99.
9. 'nos cathédrales' ... 'sculptures Japonaises' ... 'subordination constante du détail à la logique de l'ensemble'. Louis Gonse, *L'art japonais* [1883], London 2003, p. 89 (in the context of his discussion of Japanese *netsuke*).
10. 'écriture'. Félix Bracquemond, 'Estampes de M. de Goncourt' [1897], in *Bracquemond: Ecrits*, p. 262.
11. See Belinda Thomson, exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, Edinburgh (National Galleries of Scotland) 2005, esp. pp. 56-57.
12. 'une sorte d'éblouissement voisin du vertige'. Bracquemond, *Du dessin et de la couleur*, p. 91.
13. Notably by Edmond de Goncourt, Philippe Burty, Siegfried Bing, the importer Philippe Sichel, amateurs such as the publisher Gonse and Henri Cernuschi, and the independent Japanese dealer Tadamasa Hayashi. The principal interests of this group (with the exception of Hayashi), are indicated in Philippe Sichel, *Notes d'un bibeloteur au Japon*, preface by Edmond de Goncourt, Paris 1883, a loose account of his importing visit to Japan in 1874.
14. Originally ornamental toggles worn on the clothes, especially the belt (*obi*) of nobility, characterized by bold carving and a marked deformation of expression. On *netsuke* and dress, see S.M. Best, 'Netsuke and Japanese dress', in Eskenazi (ed.), *Japanese netsuke from the Carré collection*, London 1993, pp. 15-19.
15. 'c'est un monde d'infiniment petits dont la variété dépasse tout ce que l'on peut imaginer'. Gonse, *L'art japonais*, p. 84.
16. Bogmila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Vincent van Gogh and the birth of cloisonism*, Toronto 1981, p. 50, notes the 'unconventional' nature of the portrait but does not suggest any link with Japanese objects.
17. 'Examinez les Japonais qui dessinent

pourtant admirablement et vous verrez la vie en plein air et au soleil sans ombres' ('Look at the Japanese who are certainly excellent draughtsmen and you will see life depicted in open air and in sun without shadows'). Letter to Bernard (undated, Arles, November 1888), in Daniel Guérin (ed.), *Oviri: Ecrits d'un sauvage*, Paris 1974, pp. 44-45; English trans. in Maurice Malingue (ed.), *Paul Gauguin: Letters to his wife and friends*, trans. Henry J. Stenning, London 1946, pp. 112-13.

18. Gauguin, 'Notes sur l'art à l'Exposition Universelle', *Le Moderniste illustré*, 4 July 1889.

19. See the discussion in James Kearns, *Symbolist landscapes: The place of painting in the poetry and criticism of Mallarmé and his circle*, London 1989, p. 7.

20. On Mallarmé and illustration as ornament, see Juliet Simpson, 'Symbolist illustration and visual metaphor: Remy de Gourmont's and Alfred Jarry's *L'Ymagier*', *Word & Image* 21, no. 2 (April-June 2005), esp. pp. 151-54.

21. 'Nous revendiquons pour le roman le droit de rythmer la phrase, d'en accentuer la déclamation: la tendance est vers un poème en prose très mobile et rythmé différemment suivant les allures, les contournements [...] les simplicités de l'Idée.' Gustave Kahn, 'Réponse des symbolistes', *L'Événement*, 26 September 1886 & seq.; reprinted (in full) in Michael Pakenham (ed.), *Symbolistes et décadents: textes littéraires*, Exeter 1989, pp. 30-31.

22. 'flexion perpétuelle du vers'; 'prose très mobile et rythmé différemment'; 'l'entrelacement des rythmes avec la mesure de l'Idée'. Ibid., p. 30.

23. 'le rêve étant indistinct de la vie'. Ibid.

24. G.-Albert Aurier, 'Concurrence', *Le Moderniste illustré* [27 June 1889], Geneva 1971, p. 74.

25. 'cette courageuse tentative'. Ibid.

26. On this development, see Juliet Simpson, *Aurier, symbolism and the visual arts*, Bern, Frankfurt & Oxford 1999, esp. discussions of the 'Isolés' (chapter 3).

27. 'peintures égyptiennes, mosaïques Byzantines' ... 'kakémonos'. Maurice Denis, 'Définition du néo-traditionnisme' [1890]; reprinted in O. Revault d'Allonnes (ed.), *Du symbolisme au classicisme: Théories*, Paris 1964, p. 40.

28. 'peinture très simple, populaire, quasiment enfantine'. G.-Albert Aurier, 'Les isolés: Vincent

van Gogh', *Mercur de France*, no. 1 (January 1890); reprinted in Albert Aurier, *Textes critiques 1889-1892: De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*, Paris 1995, p. 72.

29. 'Loin, très loin, sur une fabuleuse colline, dont le sol apparaît de vermillon rutilant'.

G. Albert Aurier, 'Le symbolisme en peinture. Paul Gauguin', *Mercur de France* 18, no. 15 (March 1891), p. 155; reprinted in Aurier, *Textes critiques*, p. 26.

30. Reading this as a 'description' of Gauguin's work rather than in terms of a 'poem' arguably misses the suggestive nature of Aurier's 'decorative' literary analogy: cf. Guillermo Solana, 'The faun awakes: Gauguin and the revival of the pastoral', in exhib. cat. *Gauguin and the origins of symbolism*, ed. Guillermo Solana, Richard Shiff et al., Madrid (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza) 2004-5, pp. 45-46.

31. 'Ces caractères directement significateurs (formes, lignes, couleurs, etc...), l'artiste aura toujours le droit de les exagérer, de les déformer, non seulement suivant sa vision individuelle [...] mais suivant les besoins de l'Idée à exprimer.' Ibid., p. 35.

32. 'vertige de l'imagination' ... 'l'hypnose contemplative'. Paul Souriau, *La suggestion dans l'art*, Paris 1893, pp. 2-3.

33. 'toutes les illusions auxquelles se complait dans ses jeux l'imagination figurative, nous les verrons usitées en décoration.' Ibid., p. 101: a development of ideas broached in his *Théorie de l'invention*, Paris 1881.

34. 'transfiguration visuelle' ... 'continueuse équivoque de vision'. Ibid., pp. 101-2.

35. 'à la fois, subjective, synthétique, symboliste et idéiste'. Aurier, 'Le symbolisme', p. 35.

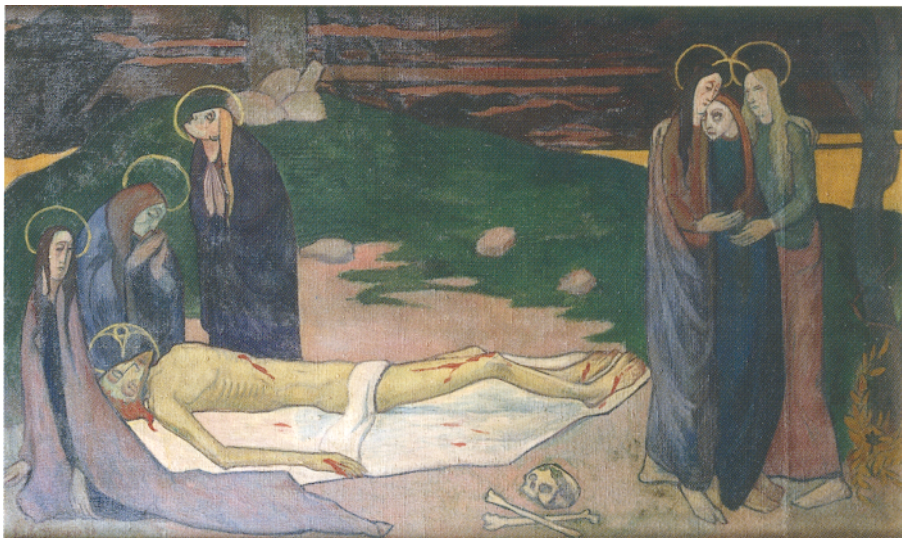
36. 'il se trouve, de plus, au fond, identique à l'art primitif, à l'art tel qu'il fut deviné par les génies instinctifs des premiers temps de l'humanité.' Ibid., p. 36.

37. See George Shackelford, 'Prologue' in exhib. cat. *Gauguin Tahiti*, Paris (Grand Palais) & Boston (Museum of Fine Arts), 2003-4, pp. 15-16.

38. 'les troublants caressements de l'énigme'. Aurier, 'Le symbolisme', p. 38.

39. See Kearns, *Symbolist landscapes*, chapter 2; cf. Simpson, *Aurier*, chapter 5.





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1. Emile Bernard, *Christ taken down from the Cross*, 1890, oil on canvas, 90×130 cm.  
Private collection; L 267

# **From Gauguin to Péladan: Emile Bernard and the first Salon of the Rose+Croix**

Rodolphe Rapetti

There can be no doubt that the controversy which developed in the wake of Aurier's article 'Le symbolisme en peinture' was to a large extent the cause of Emile Bernard's departure for Italy and then Egypt. From many points of view this flight from Western civilization looks like a flight from the Paris art world and its art critics. In this paper I want to ask a number of questions about the paradoxical period in Bernard's career which immediately preceded his departure from France in 1893, a two-year period that began with the publication of Aurier's article and whose high point was the artist's participation in the first Salon of the Rose+Croix.

Bernard's Egyptian period, which lasted from 1893 to 1904, is most usually characterized as a period of stylistic retrenchment, of 'retour à l'ordre', which heralded the polemical and reactionary attitude the artist adopted when he came back to France for good. Here is not the place to examine the validity of that characterization, although it is obvious that it only imperfectly recreates Bernard's position vis-à-vis tradition, a position that was infinitely complex, as I have tried to demonstrate in the case of his relations with Cézanne.<sup>1</sup> What I want to argue is that, although stylistically the works Bernard presented to Paris in the early 1890s were still linked to cloisonism, his thinking and to some degree the intellectual foundations of his art corresponded by then to new orientations. I believe that two



factors played a crucial role in this: firstly the importance given to religious feeling in Aurier's famous article; secondly, the pervading atmosphere of an idealizing and mystical symbolism, particularly as it became manifest in the aesthetic thinking of Joséphin Péladan.

#### 'Symbolism in painting' and the first Salon of the Rose+Croix

In his memoir, *L'aventure de ma vie*, Bernard has little to say about his participation in the first Salon of the Rose+Croix, although he acknowledges that this event gave him his first taste of fame.<sup>2</sup> But in the important retrospective article 'Le symbolisme pictural 1886-1936', published in the *Mercure de France* at the end of his life, he made clear that this salon, organized at Joséphin Péladan's instigation in 1892, marked, at least 'in official circles', the first appearance of symbolism in painting.<sup>3</sup> There can be no question that Bernard's presence alongside the artists who united under Sâr Péladan's banner to proclaim their disdain of naturalism represented a deeply held aspiration on his part, one shared at the time by many key figures of the symbolist generation. But that choice was mixed up with a number of other considerations, and it is these that I want to look at first.

The appearance of Albert Aurier's article hailing Gauguin as inventor of pictorial symbolism in 1891 created a genuine trauma for Bernard, one that offers a partial explanation of his behaviour up to the time he left France for Italy in 1893.<sup>4</sup> In his autobiography, when he gets to the point of talking about his stay in Pont-Aven in 1888, Bernard writes: 'I will pass rapidly over the following years.'<sup>5</sup> For the artist the period between *Breton women in the meadow* (1888; see p. 10, ill. 1) and his first trip to Florence became the subject of a sort of taboo inseparable from repeated restatements of the question as to who was the originator of synthetism – a claim he bitterly contended with Gauguin – and reflections on Aurier's article. Among the strategies Bernard set in place in order to redress the injustice he had been done, his participation in the first Salon of the Rose+Croix played a key role, which we owe it to ourselves to explain, since Bernard himself gave few indications as to what his true feelings were at that time.

At the time he founded the Salon of the Rose+Croix, Joséphin Péladan was an extremely well known writer and a fashionable figure. Celebrated in the literary world following the publication in 1884 of his first novel, *Le vice suprême*,<sup>6</sup> which Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly honoured by writing a preface, he was the literary embodiment of an extremely provocative mélange of social conservatism, idealism, mysticism and perversity. An occultist, Péladan began by joining the revived Order of the Rose+Croix, founded by Stanislas de Guaita, before creating the Catholic Order of the Rose+Croix in 1891, of which he proclaimed himself Grand Master. The Salon of the Rose+Croix can be seen as the aesthetic

manifestation of a method of thinking which through various modes of expression – criticism, the novel, theatre – penetrated the social, political and religious domain. For the remainder of his career, Péladan would increasingly prove himself to be a man of many talents. But this aspect was already there in embryo in the multiplicity of activities he engaged in from the mid-1880s on, a time when he succeeded in whipping up a media storm around his persona, and when the man of letters was matched by the man of action. The establishment of the ‘Rose+Croix esthétique’ in 1891 is evidence of a heightened sensibility on Péladan’s part (he had after all been an art critic since 1881) to the new images in which an increasingly clear-cut reaction against naturalism was becoming manifest. The hitching of this symbolist trend to the Rosicrucian movement, in the form of exhibitions that brought together the enemies of naturalism, was without question a major event in the artistic life of Paris.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, Bernard’s participation seems to have been a determined act on his part in pursuit of the fame that he had so far been denied.

If one looks at the text in which Péladan announced the establishment of the ‘Rose+Croix esthétique’, one is struck by the fact that the author, following a procedure that was to become habitual, annexed that aesthetic to his critical reviews of the different Salons of 1891. So it was possible to find in one and the same volume, published by Dentu on the 14 May 1891, both the general principles upon which he was to found his crusade and a review of the Champ-de-Mars Salon in which he evoked Gauguin’s carved wooden relief *Be in love, and you will be happy* (see p. 42, ill. 7) in these terms:

I saw in one of the first floor bays an extremely ugly object signed Gauguin. It looked like a polychrome reproduction of some Mexican thing. In sculpture, there must be no exoticism, no monsters and above all no inscriptions; the rhythm of bodies suffices to convey all that is intrinsic to this art form, which must not depart from nobility of style, all relief must emphatically be beautiful.<sup>8</sup>

Bearing in mind that this publication came so soon after Aurier’s article on Gauguin, which appeared in the March number of the *Mercur de France*, one can imagine Bernard’s satisfaction on finding words, from the pen of one of the most noted writers of the day, which seemed to avenge him for the affront that Aurier’s article represented. There can be no question that Péladan’s article, appearing alongside the set of rules drawn up for the Salon of the Rose+Croix, weighed heavily in Bernard’s decision to take part in that Salon. It would seem that Bernard thought that by joining Sâr Péladan’s Rosicrucian phalanx he would find support that would help him take his revenge in a brilliant way.

To some extent, Bernard fully succeeded in the aim he had set himself: he was seen at the Rose+Croix as one of the protagonists, a representative of innovatory aesthetic currents. In September 1893, several months after he had left France for Italy and Samos, an important article by Francis Jourdain appeared in *La Plume*, 'Notes sur le peintre Emile Bernard'. A postscript re-established Bernard's prior claim to the invention of the style made up of flat colour areas, which, according to Aurier, had laid the foundations of pictorial symbolism.<sup>9</sup> Clearly inspired by Bernard, this restatement was not enough to close the wound, which would plague him for the rest of his life. An unpublished letter written to his mother shortly after the death of Charles Laval reveals how crucial this question was when Bernard was about to exhibit at the Rose+Croix.

Poor Laval. His was a wasted existence ... and all thanks to Gauguin. How happy I am when I consider that I myself had the strength not to let that deluded man dominate me and that I got away from him four years ago now. If he encouraged me to begin with, that was good for me, but I don't doubt that if I had heeded his advice it would have held me back because the route he has taken will not take him far in my opinion [*sic*], basically what he's after now is the bizarre and the curious. Well that has short-term entertainment value but people quickly tire of it. Things that go deep are not shocking. On the contrary,



2. Emile Bernard, *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, 1889, oil on canvas, 114 × 162 cm.  
Whereabouts unknown; L 219

one only gets to know them slowly and understand them fully through slow and sustained meditation. That's the big difference as I see it, without flattering myself, between Gauguin and myself, he gives pleasure but people quickly tire of him, as they do of everything that is at first sight seductive.<sup>10</sup>

It is striking to note the extent to which these words of Bernard's, written at the beginning of his exile, reflect the main lines of the critique relating to Gauguin formulated three years earlier by Péladan; Bernard too denounces Gauguin's taste for the bizarre. If one was to equal the old masters through 'slow and sustained' meditation this implied renouncing the facile exoticism which, in his view, characterized his former friend.

Bernard's identification with the figure of Christ in several paintings painted in the late 1880s, like *The meeting of Christ and the Virgin* of c. 1889 (Private collection; L 301), is not unconnected to the troubled state of his feelings after his difficult dealings with Gauguin. The key painting for this equation between the betrayed genius and the suffering of Christ is his *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (ill. 2),<sup>11</sup> now lost, in which Bernard manifestly lent Gauguin's features to Judas. In fact this was noticed by Gauguin, who, on receiving a photograph of the painting, wrote about it to Bernard from Le Pouldu in 1890 in a famous letter:

...the canvas is imbued from one end to the other with determination, an imaginative style which I find absolutely stunning. The extreme elongation of the praying figure is very bold and adds to its movement. You did well to exaggerate it, at least it doesn't remind one of the model or of that wretched 'nature'. The soldiers come out well. One glimpses a head of Judas who looks vaguely like me in the photograph. Don't worry, I haven't taken offence...<sup>12</sup>

This painting was exhibited at the Rose+Croix and it is reasonable to suppose that, in that context and at that date, the portrait of Gauguin as Judas took on revengeful meaning. It is surprising that the artist did not send his *Christ taken down from the Cross* to the exhibition (ill. 1),<sup>13</sup> which, like the *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, made up part of his bedroom decoration in Asnières. These are in effect the two most important works demonstrating the mystic orientation of Bernard during this period and his deviation away from cloisonism-synthetism towards a neo-medieval, deliberately archaicizing aesthetic. Gauguin, in a letter written from Le Pouldu in November 1889, made a few criticisms of *Christ taken down from the Cross*, of which Bernard had just sent him a photograph.<sup>14</sup> Was that the reason Bernard did not exhibit it?

At the end of 1891, Jacques Daurelle published an article which for Bernard marked his first taste of fame. The fact that it was published in *L'Echo de Paris* meant that the young artist, who had hitherto been confined to minor journals,

was given his first access to the mainstream press. Daurelle concentrated on this painting, once again in the context of opposition to Gauguin:

He is an enquiring, passionate mind, a sharp fellow more capable of dying of starvation than of making the least concession where his art is concerned.

He is also an ardent and practising Catholic, which explains the mysticism of his paintings [note here the connection with the professed Catholic orientation of Péladan].

In Asnières, in a small wooden studio and in the house he lives in with his parents, we were able to see many curious sketches, absolutely original canvases, stained glass windows of surprising artistic beauty, wooden panels sculpted with infinite care, and tapestries of extreme originality.

In this young painter's small bedroom we noticed a *Christ taken down from the Cross*, which conveyed a very powerful emotion.

The impression we brought away from this studio visit was that M. Emile Bernard – whom people have accused of plagiarizing Paul Gauguin – does not look like him at all – oh! not at all.

M. Emile Bernard is a hieratic, nothing else. His painting exclusively translates religious feelings. As for his techniques, they are very simple: few colours are used, and only dull, muted ones.<sup>15</sup>

This observation on colour is of major importance. Indeed it anticipates a major aspect of future criticism about Bernard, who, rallying to the idea of tradition, was to denounce much later the idea of pure colour. The muted colours of *Christ taken down from the Cross* can thus be considered as Bernard adopting the opposite tack to the pure vermillion which Aurier was to celebrate. You will have gathered that one of my arguments is that Bernard's reaction against Gauguin – as we see from the Judas in *Christ in the Garden of Olives* – started to manifest itself in the young artist's work before the article by Aurier. As a letter written to his mother in 1894 demonstrates, it even seems that his religious paintings made up a sort of symbolic cycle evoking his disillusionment with Gauguin:

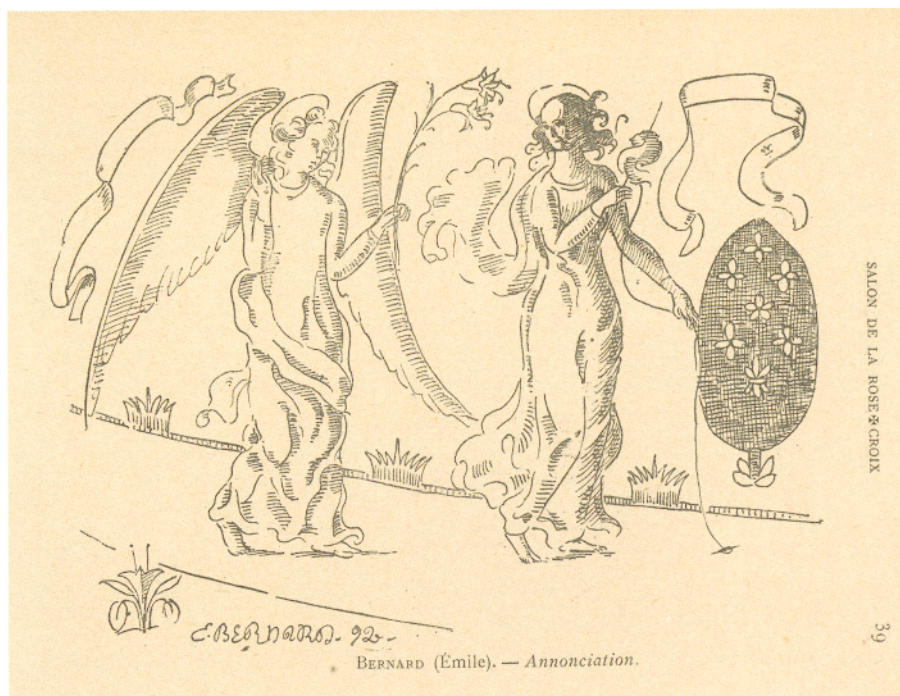
From the *Christ in the Garden of Olives* done in response to my first major blow – the betrayal by Gauguin whom I thought my friend – to the *Christ taken down from the Cross*, the consummation of the sacrifice, demonstration of devotion. From the *Christ carrying His Cross*, with its acceptance of resignation and of the burden for the sake of renewal, to my self-portrait [p. 154, ill. 18], the image of a desperate struggle between damnation and redemption. How many cries cast into the silence, how many unacknowledged tears?<sup>16</sup>

The *Christ taken down from the Cross* – of which Gauguin had received a photograph by November 1889 – was signed and dated 1890 by the artist. It is tempting to think that Bernard, reacting to Gauguin's criticisms, retouched this painting at the start of 1890 before signing it. If so, the work would be one over which the shadow of his friend turned enemy hovered; small wonder, in the context we have just described, Bernard decided not to show it.

### A dual identity

A combative and headstrong character, Bernard was active on several fronts at the start of the year 1892. At the Rose+Croix, he showed symbolist and religious works inspired by the Middle Ages. At the Salon des Indépendants he showed nine canvases: a still life, modern, urban landscapes – including *Ile de la Grande-Jatte* (1890, Private collection; L 250) – and Breton scenes. Among the latter were four paintings from 1888, in particular the decorative diptych consisting of *Breton women in the meadow* (see p. 10, ill. 1) and *The buckwheat harvest* (Josefowitz Collection; L 289). Elsewhere I have tried to show that this painting too could have played a role in the genesis of Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon*.<sup>17</sup> In the catalogue of the Indépendants Bernard took care to give each painting its title and date, something he had neglected to do on the previous occasion he had shown with the Indépendants. Quite clearly, the collection of major works from the beginnings of synthetism that he assembled there represented his claim to be recognized as the style's originator. Bernard was asserting a dual identity in this month of March 1892. He was presenting himself as the inventor of a new visual language, cloisonism, yet demonstrating in his more recent works that this new style was susceptible of merging with a tradition that went back to medieval art and was intrinsically linked to the idea of mysticism and religiosity. So this dual identity to which he laid claim in March 1892 – as holding the rights both to stylistic innovation and to being a mystic symbolist – corresponded to a combative plan of action. This would not get resolved until he was in Egypt, and he then situated himself in a historical perspective that encompassed the contributions of the Italian colourists of the Renaissance. Around 19 February 1892, Bernard wrote to Andreas Bonger: 'I left Couilly three days ago to prepare my exhibits for the Rose+Croix and the Indépendants. All these exhibitions should be amusing. Six this year. Champs-Élysées, Champ de Mars, Libéraux, Indépendants, Rose+Croix, Refusés.'<sup>18</sup>

Bernard's submission to the Rose+Croix Salon comprised only three works: *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, *Christ carrying His Cross*, today lost but described by Francis Jourdain in his 1893 article,<sup>19</sup> and an *Annunciation*, reproduced in the exhibition catalogue (ill. 3). *Christ carrying His Cross* can be identified through a watercolour (ill. 4), dated 1893 but possibly done to save the memory of the



painting. To this day no painting has been identified that corresponds precisely to the *Annunciation* reproduced in the Rose+Croix catalogue. A similar painting with a similar composition and figure of the Virgin is known (1890?, Private collection; L 266), but there the angel is represented kneeling and the background landscape is different.<sup>20</sup> Note that the reproduction that appeared in the catalogue is dated 1892 and the tree on the right, a kind of stylized privet with floret decorations, would reappear in the frescoes (now destroyed) he executed at Samos the following year.

With the possible exception of this painting, therefore, Bernard's submission was made up of works that were already several years old: the *Christ in the Garden of Olives* from 1889 and the *Christ carrying His Cross* from 1888 or 1889. Bernard in fact had few recent works that corresponded to the strict iconographic criteria laid down by Péladan for admission to the Rose+Croix. Highly critical of the way the irruption of realism in the art of his century had brought about a subversion of the hierarchy of the pictorial genres, Péladan intended to restore to religious, mythological and history painting their dominant position at the top of that hierarchy. However, during 1891 Bernard's output was relatively small, as he was pre-occupied with his efforts to safeguard the memory of his friend Vincent van Gogh, struggling to organize an exhibition of the latter's works before they went back to



3. Emile Bernard, *Annunciation*, 1892 [?]; reproduction in catalogue of the First Salon of the Rose+Croix, 1892



4. Emile Bernard, *Christ carrying His Cross*, 1893, watercolour, dimensions unknown. Private collection

the Netherlands and trying to find a way of publishing his letters – or those he could gather together. This publication eventually came about in 1893, in the *Mercure de France*.<sup>21</sup>

Bernard was close to Antoine de La Rochefoucauld, whom Péladan had made both patron and kingpin of his Salon. A neo-impressionist of symbolist tendencies, La Rochefoucauld was to put his considerable fortune behind several artists, Bernard among them – he shared the latter's interest in Cézanne and Van Gogh – who seem diametrically opposed to Péladan's aesthetic precepts. At the time of the first Salon de la Rose+Croix, Bernard was seen as the main representative of a group whose style cut across the rest of the exhibitors, as witness the comments of Léonce de Larmandie (in 1903), who, having listed certain of the most significant artists of the 'first aesthetic gesture', closed his description thus:

Opposite these artists there was another class of painters: the mystic impressionists synthesized in the figure of Emile Bernard. The latter, who were destined to be much discussed, to have their detractors as well as their supporters, and who doubtless had little to do with the classical rules of Beauty, nevertheless lent a special and considerable lustre to the exhibition, in which they occupied quarter of the available wall space.<sup>22</sup>

We know that the presence of these painters was the real cause of the definitive break between Péladan and La Rochefoucauld. Clearly the stylistic innovations of La Rochefoucauld and his friends introduced a disturbing element, a neo-impressionist and cloisonist dissonance from the majority of exhibitors, who claimed allegiance, rather, to Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes and the English Pre-Raphaelites. Charles Filiger, alongside Bernard, was the most notable French artist among the undesirables. Bernard had already been interested in him for some time, and, at the end of 1891, in order to bring him to public notice, had written Léon Deschamps, the editor of *La Plume*, a letter that was published in that journal, in which Bernard considered Filiger as a mystic artist with an innovative style.<sup>23</sup> Other painters like Gaetano Previati, Jan Toorop and Félix Vallotton – none of whom would appear in subsequent Rose+Croix Salons – also represented at that first exhibition stylistic leanings that were fundamentally at odds with the return to the Italian Renaissance which Péladan was advocating and would continue to advocate. But the critics homed in on the synthetic distortions of Bernard and Filiger. If the works Bernard sent were not always appreciated, he was at least taken seriously for his eccentricity, as the following text reveals:

M. E. Bernard is exhibiting, together with his literary 'Christ carrying His Cross', a *Christ in the Garden of Olives* in the same vein: a concern for suggestivity takes precedence over all care over details in the objectified scene, which has been reduced to the simplicity of a formulaic rectilinearity – close rapport between the colours used and the *psychology* of the subject, at the expense of their accuracy if one considers the question of *air* and *light*. This artist paints souls, explains his characters' thoughts, translates their psychic states with a [illegible], with a tone/hue sometimes completely disrupting the harmony of ensemble, colour and line. His painting is *interesting* but it fails to arouse the *emotion* essential to the work of art.<sup>24</sup>

We cannot, however, simply present Bernard's relations with the Rose+Croix as though they resulted from his links with La Rochefoucauld alone. Indeed, we know that Bernard met Péladan at Saint-Briac some time between August and October 1891, that is a few months after the publication of Péladan's *Salon* of 1891 referred to earlier.<sup>25</sup> Clearly it was during that meeting and thanks to that text that an alliance was forged between the two men. One should not underestimate the degree of fudging and opportunism that may have led Péladan, just then preparing what was to be the major publicity stunt of his career, to welcome on board a painter who did not strictly conform to his preferred models.

People generally see the addition of Filiger and Bernard as having been forced upon Péladan by La Rochefoucauld. The truth of the matter was doubtless more complex. There is no question that Péladan's aesthetic ideology became more

rigid with time and that at the period that concerns us it had a twofold character. Before the first Rose+Croix Salon, the theoretical justification of his art-critical standpoints presented a dichotomy which could easily accommodate Bernard. To understand this phenomenon we need to go a long way back in Péladan's criticism, which, as it appeared between the start of the 1880s and the start of the 1890s, was, to say the least, just as subversive as it was reactionary. Influenced by Ruskin, but also subscribing to the Baudelairean model of an art of the imagination which rejected all subservience to truth to life, Péladan was calling for that purity of vision which the whole of the nineteenth century ascribed to the artists who immediately preceded the Renaissance, unfailingly linking the idea of a creativity freed of material contingencies to a glorious past bearing the stamp of mysticism.

Thus we see in 1881 Péladan setting the 'awkward but sublime works' of the primitives against the contemporary pictorial tradition born of paganism, and devoid of depth and thought. Here we find once again a very early formulation of that link between painting and Christianity, between art and mysticism to which Bernard pledged himself at the end of the 1880s and start of the 1890s. The notion that art is only authentic if it carries spiritual significance is central here, and Péladan goes on to describe as 'miraculous' 'a work of art which rubs elbows with Raphael and yet, technically, is inferior to an *image d'Epinal*'.<sup>26</sup> Doubtless he was still much exercised by this idea when he met Bernard in Saint-Briac, given that *L'instauration de la Rose-Croix esthétique* (1891) included in its programme the dictum, 'Do away with the attachment to correct technique, extinguish this obsession with artistry, subordinate *the arts to Art*, that is to say return to tradition, which means making the ideal the unique goal of work in architecture, painting or sculpture.'<sup>27</sup> 'Do away with the attachment to correct technique': had it not been Péladan's formula, one could easily attribute this to Gauguin. As happened earlier with the English Pre-Raphaelites, the fascination with the formal beauty of the Italian Renaissance would gradually mask over that artificial quest for naivety, which cut so directly across the positivist faith of his century. The artists who were close to La Rochefoucauld would not be invited back to the subsequent Rosicrucian Salons, and in 1894 Péladan implicitly condemned – among other things – cloisonism-synthetism, when he wrote in *L'art idéaliste et mystique* about:

those nameless things people exhibit with impunity which lack all identity, drawing, half-tones, modelling, perspective and form. The newspapers dub them impressionism or symbolism, for all reasonable beings they represent insanity. Some of them go so far as to call themselves 'déformateurs', others 'tachistes'. O noble Greeks, what would you have said, if you saw these madmen jeer at the golden section and pride themselves on their ignorance, or better still set it up as a theory! And you, Renaissance geniuses, you never

imagined that *light*, that constant light one finds in your frescoes, would become synonymous with popular art and the worst charlatanism.<sup>28</sup>

Here in embryo are the opinions professed by Bernard in the criticism he wrote after his return from Egypt.

Later on, Bernard would come by his own personal path to that same quest for formal harmony taken from Renaissance sources. But for the time being he was still preoccupied by seeking a way of achieving expressive power through radical form. But he would progress along this path slowly, and this accounts for all the ambiguity of his art in the period 1890-95. In 1895, when he was in Cairo, he published an article in the *Mercure de France* entitled 'Ce que c'est que l'art mystique' ('Understanding mystical art'). Clearly it was a response to the work by Péladan quoted earlier, and in it Bernard defends a somewhat different idea, one that was opposed to fidelity to the Renaissance canons. He wrote thus:

No matter how much we admire pagan Greek art, we cannot, in all logic and in all honesty to ourselves, raise it above the three other arts [Byzantine, Egyptian, Gothic], nor even put it on their level, for despite its exterior perfection it is only on the surface. The shapeless scribbling of Rembrandt, the clumsiness of rustic Breton or Arab art will always have more to say to us than the Venus de Milo, however much pleasure our eye may take in contemplating her, white, against a dark velvet background.<sup>29</sup>

This pursuit of clumsiness as the mode of expression for a primitive emotion was one of the essential components of the symbolist aesthetic, which, as we know, took diverse formal paths. This was the thinking that gave rise to the review *L'Ymagier*, founded in 1894 by Remy de Gourmont and Alfred Jarry, in which engravings by contemporary artists – Bernard among them – appeared alongside old wood engravings and *images d'Epinal*. The works Bernard presented at the first Rosicrucian Salon bear witness, with a particularly strained effort, to that attempt to bring into the reputedly noble medium of painting forms that owed their origin to other fields, in particular those of wood engraving, stained glass and medieval sculpture. This breaking down of the stylistic and technical barriers ran counter to the thinking of Péladan. As with all thinkers engaged in practical activity, forms, as much as human intervention, were to orientate Péladan's ideas. The events linked to the first Rosicrucian Salon would play a decisive role in this respect.

## Idealism and mysticism

There was nothing that could be done to alter the stylistic heterogeneity of the Rosicrucian enterprise, which reflected that of symbolism itself, in spite of the esoteric cement with which Péladan brought the images together. An article by Alphonse Germain published the day after the opening of the Salon of the Rose+Croix throws very clear light on the split that followed.<sup>30</sup> Referring to the idealism of Hegel, Kant and Schelling, Germain, an occasional painter himself, whilst considering the manifest reaction against naturalism salutary, deplored the fact that the organizers should have included in the exhibition certain items that were not ‘self-confessed idealizations, examples of style or at least works betraying a desire for beauty, for lofty aspirations,’ and had ended up with a lot of works that seriously harmed the advertised aesthetic principles. Germain’s criticism targeted in particular ‘the abstract plasticity, which will never attain the ideal, as in the case of those who produce according to academic conventions or with the sophistry of the distorters.’ Further on, he illustrated his assertions by citing a few names: ‘As for the ideal, you’ll look for it in vain among the frigidities of a Delaroche, the correctnesses of a Lefebvre, the false naivety of a Filliger [sic] or the drunken linearity of a Bernard [...]’<sup>31</sup> The article ended with a list of the artists who satisfied, in the author’s view, the criteria of idealism. At the top of the list was Alexandre Séon, who was exhibiting among other works that year a *Portrait of Sâr Péladan* (Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts). Associated for a time with Seurat, Séon was likewise preoccupied with optical colour theories and undertook far-reaching experiments in this area. On several occasions Alphonse Germain devoted laudatory reviews to his work, setting it against the neo-impressionism of Seurat and Signac, which he considered too literal. One can understand how much was at stake at the Rose+Croix Salon for factions which hitherto had scarcely come face to face. A neo-impressionist himself, an esoteric in terms of his subject matter but leaning towards the modernists Pissarro and Signac, La Rochefoucauld – and with him the artists he backed – was unquestionably discredited by the ‘idealist’ fringe of the group, towards whom Péladan allowed himself to gravitate. Bernard was the leading representative of the stylistic orientation that needed to be eradicated from the Rose+Croix; he would never exhibit there again.

A document handwritten by Péladan confirms this sudden volte-face. It is the first list of artists who were to exhibit at the Rose+Croix, drawn up in August 1891 and containing just twenty-seven names.<sup>32</sup> Unsurprisingly one finds on it painters like Séon, Armand Point, Alphonse Osbert or Carlos Schwabe, who would go on to epitomize the Sâr’s aesthetic in future exhibitions. What is more surprising, however, is to find, in that very first rough outline, the names of Emile Bernard, Louis Anquetin, Léon Fauché, Maurice Denis, Charles Filiger, Odilon Redon, Emile Schuffenecker. Although these painters were evidently introduced by La

Rochevoucauld, it is hard to imagine Péladan allowing a list of names to be dictated to him without realizing what it implied in terms of his exhibition's content.

Another reason for Bernard's drawing close to Péladan needs to be introduced here: their taste for the esoteric. Very little is known about Bernard's connections with the hermetic movement, but it seems that they were at their strongest in the early 1890s. For instance in 1890 he copied out and wrote a commentary on several passages from the *Histoire de la Magie* by Eliphas Lévi, who was one of the main occultists of the nineteenth century. This manuscript of over 100 pages opens with a drawing showing 'the pentagram of the absolute', a radiating star whose five branches end in suns inscribed with these mottos: 'Existence is / Reality / Justice / Reason / Truth.'<sup>33</sup>

Esotericism, mystic quest, reference to chivalry as found in Wagnerism made up the intellectual climate which drew Péladan and Bernard together. Indeed the years 1890-92 saw the emergence in Bernard's work of a few paintings whose chivalric subjects or themes marked by a nostalgia for courtly love are unparalleled among art of the time, at least among artists committed to stylistic innovation. *Tournament at dusk* (1891, Private collection, Paris; L 299), or the illustrations to *Roland furieux*, (1892, Private collection, Paris) refer to the chivalric romances and suggest that Bernard was establishing a parallel between the chivalric ideal and the artistic ideal in so far as, at that time, art was linked in his mind to the idea of mysticism. This is borne out by the images Péladan was to use a few years later at the opening of *L'art idéaliste et mystique*: 'Our mission began the day blasphemy became king; what we need is an order of chivalry dedicated to honouring and serving the Ideal; imperfect and sinful as we are, let us at least become valiant knights; let the rose of forms and colours become the wonderful tabernacle, and the voice of redemption will find pleasure there.'<sup>34</sup>

And yet, Bernard did not show any of the works of this kind at the Rose+Croix. Perhaps their Cézannesque touch and their experimental character dissuaded him from doing so. He concentrated on pictures whose cloisonism had become merged with a self-conscious referencing of medieval art. Thus the solitary path Bernard had chosen for himself coincided with a branch of Péladan's aesthetic, but the one that the latter would soon abandon, preferring in future to take his references from antique sculpture and from the 'great Florentine artists'. Despite the intellectual convergence between the two men they could not agree over the form that the quest for idealism should take.

Let us not forget that cloisonism, which Anquetin and Bernard had created, was originally linked to an urban and modern iconography, or to still life. In some respects, as Richard Thomson has demonstrated in relation to Anquetin, and as we see in Bernard's studies of brothels, cloisonism allied itself with that contemporary spirit of social satire which, indeed, characterized a significant aspect of naturalism.<sup>35</sup>

Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon*, and this is what among other things Aurier's article underlined, marked the orientation of this style towards the expression of religious feeling, an orientation that Bernard, for his part, would build on. But it seems to me that having acknowledged this much, we are still at liberty to go further. How indeed was one to go one better than Gauguin?

*Vision of the sermon* in many ways looks like a deviation of a type of contemporary image for which Degas, notably, was renowned: the theatre scene observed from the spectators' viewpoint. That was an archetype of urban modernity to which many artists subscribed, artists connected more or less closely to naturalism, like Carrière (*Le Théâtre populaire*, 1895, Musée Rodin, Paris).

Bernard, it seems to me, prompted by Gauguin's example, would try to find a much more systematic way of subverting the modern tradition, in so far as it tackled style. By seeking to graft medieval sources onto a new visual language that had at the outset been tied to the contemporary world, namely cloisonism, by elongating his forms and borrowing Gothic sculpture's hieraticism, he was in an extremely subtle way subverting the new with the old, modernity with tradition. In this respect, the works he executed at the start of the 1890s were already polemical, in so far as they defined the evolution of art not according to a continuum but rather by seeing it as history folding back on itself. This ahistorical conception denied chronological evolution, denied indeed the very idea of progress in art.

## NOTES

1. Rodolphe Rapetti, 'L'inquiétude cézannienne: Emile Bernard et Cézanne au début du xxe siècle', *Revue de l'art*, no. 144, p. 35.
2. Emile Bernard, *L'aventure de ma vie* (typescript), p. 45. Paris, Altarriba-Recchi archives.
3. 'pour le monde officiel'. Emile Bernard, 'Le symbolisme pictural 1886-1936', *Mercur de France*, May 1936, in Emile Bernard, *Propos sur l'art*, ed. Anne Rivière, Paris 1994, vol. 1, p. 280.
4. G.-Albert Aurier, 'Le symbolisme en peinture. Paul Gauguin', *Mercur de France* 18, no. 15 (March 1891), p. 155; reprinted in Albert Aurier, *Textes critiques 1889-1892: De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*, Paris 1995, p. 26.
5. 'Je passerai rapidement sur les années qui suivirent'. Emile Bernard, *L'aventure de ma vie*, p. 38.
6. Joséphin Péladan, *Etudes passionnelles de décadence: Le vice suprême*, Paris 1884.
7. On Péladan, see Christophe Beaufils, *Joséphin Péladan 1858-1918, essai sur une maladie du lyrisme*, Grenoble 1993; Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult symbolism in France, Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix*, New York & London 1976; Jean da Silva, *Le Salon de la Rose-Croix (1892-1897)*, Paris 1991.
8. 'J'ai vu dans les travées de l'étage une chose fort laide signée Gauguin. On dirait une reproduction polychrome d'une chose mexicaine. En sculpture, ni exotisme ni monstre et surtout pas d'inscription; le rythme des corps suffit à dire tout ce que cet art comporte, mais il ne doit porter que le style noble, tout relief doit être beau impérieusement.' *Le Salon de Joséphin Péladan (Dixième année). Avec instauration de la Rose-Croix esthétique*, Paris 1891, p. 47.
9. Francis Jourdain, 'Le Salon de la Plume:



Notes sur le peintre Emile Bernard', *La Plume*, 15 September 1893, p. 390.

10. 'Pauvre Laval. C'était une existence perdue ... et cela par Gauguin. Que je suis heureux de songer que moi-même ai eu la force de ne pas subir cet homme d'erreur et que je m'en suis séparé depuis déjà quatre ans. S'il m'a encouragé au début cela a été bon pour moi, mais je ne doute pas, si je l'avais écouté qu'il m'eût fait rester stationnaire car la voie dans laquelle il s'est mis ne le mènera jamais bien loin que je pense [*sic*], car le fond de ses recherches désormais c'est la bizarrerie et le curieux. Or cela amuse un instant mais cela lasse bien vite. Les choses profondes n'étonnent pas. Au contraire on ne les connaît que lentement et ne les creuse qu'avec la méditation lente et continue. Voilà la distance que sans me flatter je crois voir entre Gauguin et moi, il plaît mais lasse vite comme tout ce qui séduit d'abord.' Around May 1894, Paris, Altarriba-Recchi Archives.

11. This work only appears in the inventory of works sold to Vollard (dated 22 May 1901) as no. 101 with the note '100 long', which refers to a format of 162 x 114 cm. The date given by that inventory is 1889, and Bernard specifies: 'C'était la décoration de ma chambre à Asnières' ('It was the decoration of the bedroom in Asnières'). The 1889 date is confirmed in the published selection Bernard made of his most important works in 1933, *Les Rénovateurs. Emile Bernard*, Paris 1933, which reproduces this painting as no. 5. It is important to note that there was a smaller-scale version of the same subject according to the inventory drawn up by Bernard on 17 March 1893, where it appears as no. 61. Painted in Saint-Briac in 1889 and bought by Vollard, this painting is described by Bernard as being in a 'naïve style'.

12. 'La toile respire d'un bout à l'autre une volonté, un style imaginaire que je trouve tout à fait épatant. La longueur démesurée de la figure en prière est très hardie et ajoute à son mouvement. Vous avez bien fait de l'exagérer, au moins on ne pense pas au modèle et cette sacrée nature. Bien disposés les guerriers. On aperçoit une tête de Judas qui me ressemble vaguement, dans la photographie. Soyez tranquille, je n'y vois pas de mal ...' Letter dated 'Le Pouldu 90'. *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Emile Bernard 1888-1891*, Geneva 1954, p. 89.

13. Like the *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, this

painting is not listed in the 1893 inventory, as the two works were then in the artist's bedroom at Asnières and not in his studio. On the other hand it is listed in the 22 May 1901 inventory as no. 76, *Christ taken down from the Cross* (decoration of my bedroom in Asnières), where it is dated 1888. The 60 format the painting is given in this inventory match the work, which is a size 60 'landscape'. Signed and dated 1890, the painting was assigned a date of 1891 in *Les Rénovateurs. Emile Bernard* (no. 6).

14. Maurice Malingue (ed.), *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, Paris 1946, p. 171.

15. 'C'est un chercheur, un passionné, un gaillard capable de périr d'inanition plutôt que de faire la moindre concession pour tout ce qui touche à son art.

'C'est aussi un catholique ardent et pratiquant, ce qui explique le mysticisme de ses peintures. 'A Asnières, dans un petit atelier en planches et dans la maison où Emile Bernard demeure avec ses parents, nous avons pu voir quantité de croquis curieux, de toiles tout à fait originales, des vitraux d'une beauté artistique surprenante, des panneaux sculptés avec un soin infini, des tapisseries d'une extrême originalité.

'Dans la chambrette de ce jeune peintre nous remarquons un *Christ décloqué* dont la vue donne une très vive émotion.

'L'impression que nous avons rapportée de cette visite à son atelier, c'est que M. Emile Bernard – que l'on a accusé de plagier Paul Gauguin, – ne lui ressemble pas du tout – oh! pas du tout.

'M. Emile Bernard n'est qu'un hiératique, et pas autre chose. Sa peinture ne traduit que des sentiments religieux. Quant à ses procédés, ils sont très simples: peu de couleurs, et emploi des seules couleurs ternes, éteintes.' Jacques Daurelle, 'Chez les jeunes peintres', *L'Echo de Paris*, 28 December 1891.

16. 'Depuis le Christ aux oliviers fait à propos de ma première grande peine – la trahison de Gauguin que je croyais mon ami, jusqu'au Christ décloqué de la croix, consommation du sacrifice, dévouement démontré. Depuis le Christ portant sa croix, acceptation de la résignation et du fardeau pour la rénovation, jusqu'à mon propre portrait, image d'une lutte désespérée entre la damnation et le rachat. Combien de cris poussés dans le silence, combien de larmes inavouées?' Unpublished letter from Emile Bernard to his mother, 19 June 1894, Private collection. Document kindly

communicated by Mme Harscoët-Maire.

17. Rodolphe Rapetti, *Le symbolisme*, Paris 2007, p. 109.

18. 'J'ai quitté Couilly depuis trois jours pour préparer mes envois à la Rose-Croix et aux Indépendants. Cela promet d'être drôle toutes ces expositions. Six cette année. Champs-Elysées, de Mars, Libéraux, Indépendants, Rose-Croix, Refusés.' Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Bongers archives.

19. *Christ carrying His Cross* exhibited at the Rose-Croix in 1892 (no. 8) appeared as no. 64 in Bernard's 1893 inventory with the title *Marche au calvaire* (12 format) with the note 'exposé à la [exhibited at the] R. Croix 1892'. There it is dated 1888 or 1889, the inscription being difficult to read. The painting reappears in the inventory of 1 June 1901 under the title *Christ allant au calvaire*. There it is dated 1888, recorded as a size 15 format and as having been exhibited at the Rose+Croix in 1892. This now lost work is described with relative precision in Jourdain, 'Notes sur le peintre Emile Bernard', p. 393.

20. This painting (sold at Sotheby's, 29 March 1983) is probably no. 84 in the 1893 inventory, in which the artist lists an *Annonciation de Marie* (size 8 canvas). Indeed the dimensions of this painting (38.4 x 46.3 cm) correspond to a size 8 figure canvas. The painting is dated 1892 in this inventory, which agrees chronologically with the date that appears on the drawing reproduced in the Rose+Croix Salon catalogue, which is very close to this work. The initials and the date 'E.B. 90' which appear on the painting were doubtless added at a later date, the artist getting the date wrong. It is worth noting that in his inventories, Bernard always mentions that a work was exhibited at the Rose+Croix Salon when this was the case. He does not do so for this painting, nor for any of the *Annunciations* mentioned in his different inventories. The most plausible hypothesis is that the *Annunciation* presented at the Rose+Croix Salon was already in the hands of a collector at the time he drew up his inventory of the works remaining in his studio prior to his departure for Italy.

21. See *Mercure de France* 7, April 1893, p. 324.

22. 'En face de ces artistes une autre classe de peintres: les impressionnistes mystiques synthétisés dans Emile Bernard. Ceux-ci destinés à être très discutés, à posséder leurs détracteurs et leurs enthousiastes, assez éloignés

sans doute des règles classiques de la Beauté, n'en donnèrent pas moins un lustre spécial et considérable à l'exposition où ils occupèrent le quart des panneaux disponibles.' Comte de Larmandie, *Notes de psychologie contemporaine. L'entracte idéal. Histoire de la Rose-Croix*, Paris 1903, p. 15.

23. Emile Bernard, 'Critique d'art', *La Plume*, 15 December 1891, p. 441.

24. 'M. E. Bernard expose, avec son littéraire "Christ portant la croix", un *Christ au jardin des oliviers*, peint dans la même idée: souci de suggestivité primant tout soin dans le détail de la scène objectivée, réduite à la simplicité des formules droites; – rapport intime des tonalités avec la *psychologie* du sujet, à défaut de leur exactitude, si l'on considère la question *air et lumière*. Cet artiste peint des âmes, explique la pensée de ses personnages, traduit leur état psychique par un [illisible], par un ton qui parfois rompent toute harmonie d'ensemble, couleur et ligne. Sa peinture est *intéressante* mais elle ne procure pas *l'émotion* que doit toute œuvre d'art.' 'Au Salon de la Rose-Croix', incomplete press cutting, with no indication of origin or date, Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Fonds Péladan, Ms 13205.

25. See n. 8. We can date the meeting of Bernard and Péladan at Saint-Briac to around October 1891. In a letter to Bongers dated 27 October, Bernard drew attention to Péladan's presence: 'Comme sommité ici ! Albert Mockel rédacteur de Wallonie directeur. Le Sâr Péladan, chef des templiers +.' ('How about the leading people we've got here! Albert Mockel editor and director of Wallonie. Sâr Péladan, leader of the + Templars.') (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Bongers Archives).

26. 'œuvres gauchement sublimes'; 'miracle'; 'une œuvre d'art qui coudoie Raphaël et qui, techniquement, est au-dessous d'une image d'Epinal'. Joséphin Péladan, 'L'Art mystique et la critique contemporaine', *Le Foyer*, no. 313 (20 November 1881), p. 387.

27. 'Ruiner la notion qui s'attache à la bonne exécution, éteindre le dilettantisme du procédé, subordonner les arts à l'Art, c'est-à-dire rentrer dans la tradition qui est de considérer l'idéal comme le but unique de l'effort architectonique ou pictural ou plastique.' *Le Salon de Joséphin Péladan (Dixième année)*. With *L'instauration de la Rose-Croix esthétique*, Paris 1891, p. 56.

28. 'ces choses sans nom, sans dessin, sans

demi-teintes, sans modelé, sans perspective, sans forme, qu'on exhibe impunément. Cela s'appelle impressionnisme ou symbolisme, dans les journaux, et démence pour les êtres raisonnables.

'Il y en a même qui osent s'intituler les déformateurs, et d'autres les tachistes. O nobles Grecs, qu'eussiez-vous dit, en voyant ces fous bafouer la proportion sainte et s'enorgueillir de leur ignorance, bien mieux l'ériger en théorie! Et vous, Génies de la Renaissance, vous ne soupçonnez pas que le *clair*, cette constante lumière de vos fresques, deviendrait synonyme de la rue et des pires truandailles.' Sâr Péladan, *L'Art idéaliste et mystique: Doctrine de l'Ordre et du Salon annuel des Rose+Croix*, Paris 1894, p. 148.

29. 'Quelle que soit notre admiration pour l'art grec païen, nous ne pouvons, selon toute logique et selon tout sentiment réel de nous-mêmes, l'élever au-dessus des trois autres [byzantin, égyptien, gothique], ni même le mettre à leur niveau, car malgré son extérieure perfection il n'est qu'en surface. Les griffonnages informes de Rembrandt, les gaucheries de l'art breton ou de l'art arabe de campagne nous en diront toujours plus long que la Vénus de Milo, quelle que soit la réjouissance de notre œil à la contempler, blanche, sur fond sombre de velours.' Emile Bernard, 'Ce que c'est que l'art mystique', *Mercur de France*, January 1895, p. 28.

30. Alphonse Germain, 'L'idéal et l'idéalisme. Salon de la Rose+Croix', *L'Art et l'idée*, no. 3, 20 March 1892, p. 176.

31. 'que d'averées idéalizations, des pages de style ou tout au moins trahissant un désir d'aristie, des aspirations élevées'; 'la plasticité de l'abstrait, qui n'atteindra jamais l'idéal, cas de ceux qui produisent d'après les conventions académiques ou la sophistique des déformateurs'; 'L'idéal, oh! vous le chercheriez en vain dans les frigidités d'un Delaroche, les correctitudes d'un Lefebvre, la fausse naïveté d'un Filliger [sic] ou les ivresses linéaires d'un Bernard [...]'. Ibid.

32. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms 13205, fol. 584.

33. 'L'Être est / Réalité / Justice / Raison / Vérité'. Our description of this manuscript, which we have not seen, is taken from a catalogue of autographs (Alain Nicolas, Librairie Les Neuf Muses, catalogue, Summer 1994, no. 129). Bernard's name appears at

the time of the 'first manifestation' of the 'Groupe Esotérique' organized on 12 April 1899, doubtless at the instigation of Antoine de La Rochefoucauld, in the salon of a private individual, M. Valéry or Waléry, 9 bis rue de Londres, Paris. Apart from Bernard and La Rochefoucauld, the list of artists included Denis, Filiger, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Georges-Daniel de Monfreid and Schuffenecker. Bernard exhibited six works: 'No. 180 Breton women in a field. No. 131 Breton women. No. 132 The four seasons (tapestry). No. 133 Fellahs in Cairo (wood carving). No. 134 Calvary (colour lithograph lend by Comte Ant. de La Rochefoucauld). No. 135 Virgin with saints (colour lithograph). See also on this subject *Mercur de France*, 5, 1900, p. 545.

34. 'Notre mission a commencé le jour où le blasphème devint roi; qu'une chevalerie paraisse pour honorer et servir l'Idéal; imparfaits et pécheurs, soyons au moins des preux; que la rose des formes et des couleurs devienne le tabernacle admirable, et la voix rédemptrice s'y complaira.' Péladan, *L'Art idéaliste et mystique*, p. 21.

35. Richard Thomson, 'A propos de lesbianisme clandestin en plein Paris: La décadence et *Le Rond-point des Champs-Élysées* de Louis Augustin', *Histoire de l'art*, no. 50 (June 2002), p. 77.





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1. Paul Gauguin, *Blue trees*, 1888, oil on canvas, 92×73 cm.  
Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen; W 311/WN 319

# Gauguin's critical reception in Belgium in 1889 and 1891

Elise Eckermann

The first public exhibition of Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* (see p. 6, ill. 1), which the artist had painted in late summer 1888, was in the sixth Salon des Vingt in Brussels in 1889. Apart from a one-day showing at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris two years later just before its sale at auction, this was the only time it was seen by the public. Nonetheless, in 1891 the writer and art critic Albert Aurier chose this work as the focus of his article about symbolism, in which he promoted *Vision of the sermon* as the symbolist picture and Gauguin as the symbolist painter par excellence.<sup>1</sup>

This essay focuses on the critical reactions in the Belgian press to *Vision of the sermon* and other Gauguin exhibits in 1889, and it will also demonstrate that it was due to Gauguin's sculptural work, shown in Brussels in 1891, that his art was given increasingly favourable consideration in a symbolist context.

## Sixth Salon des Vingt (1889)

In late November 1888, while he was staying in Arles with Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin received an invitation from the Brussels artistic group Les Vingt to participate at their sixth annual Salon the following year.<sup>2</sup> This independent group of twenty artists, founded in 1883, was open to all progressive tendencies in art and extended this attitude to music and ideas. Invitations to participate in their Salon as guests were extended to roughly the same number of Belgian and foreign artists, and these exhibitions soon became a promising new international forum.

The invitation to Gauguin was probably prompted by Edgar Degas, who was enthusiastic about the new work Gauguin had painted in Brittany.<sup>3</sup> The art critic Félix Fénéon may also have brought the significance of Gauguin's artistic development to the attention of Octave Maus, the secretary of the group and Paris correspondent of the Belgian journal *L'Art Moderne*, which was the mouthpiece of Les Vingt.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, the art dealer Theo van Gogh may also have promoted Gauguin's interests. He had just returned from a business trip to Brussels, where he met, among others, Henry de Groux, a member of Les Vingt.<sup>5</sup>

Gauguin had anticipated an invitation from Les Vingt as early as January 1888. In a letter to his Danish wife Mette he proudly announced: 'Our movement is taking shape and gathering steam abroad as well as in France, and I am sure the day will come when we will all be through our difficulties [...]. We are invited to Brussels and probably to Glasgow [sic] as well.'<sup>6</sup> When he finally received the longed-for letter from Brussels, Gauguin accepted the invitation immediately and asked Theo van Gogh, who had his latest paintings from Brittany and Arles on consignment at the Boussod & Valadon gallery in Paris, to send the pictures to



2. Theo van Rysselberghe, *Poster for the sixth Salon des Vingt*, 1889, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels



Brussels.<sup>7</sup> The art dealer had provided the Breton canvases, which probably included *Vision of the sermon* with new white and natural wood frames.<sup>8</sup>

The exhibition opened on 2 February 1889 at the Musée de Peinture, which was made available by the Belgian government. This environment implied institutional blessing on the avant-garde artists, who had never before had an opportunity to show their works in an 'official' context. Octave Maus reported later, 'Gauguin in his naivety could not conceive that his canvases would be exhibited in an official building.'<sup>9</sup>

The works in the Salon des Vingt were for sale. Gauguin, who in his time as a stockbroker had gained considerable experience in the financial market, had a strong commercial sense as an artist and therefore chose a well-balanced portfolio of twelve exhibits. On the one hand, he showed exotic canvases from Martinique and airy impressionist landscapes painted in Brittany to please the market, but at the same time he presented more experimental works in his new, formally simplified, synthetic style, including his most recent paintings from Arles, in order to establish his credentials as an avant-garde artist.<sup>10</sup> *Among the mangoes at Martinique* (ill. 3), which belonged to Theo van Gogh, demonstrated to visitors to the Salon that Gauguin's paintings were hanging in private collections, while most of the other canvases were on sale for 500 francs each, although Gauguin put a price of 1,000 francs on *Vision of the sermon* and *In the heat* (1888, Private collection; W 301/WN 320). The most expensive picture, at 1,500 francs, was *Human misery (Grape harvest at Arles)* (1888, Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen; W 304/WN 317), but even if Gauguin considered this his most important work,<sup>11</sup> the price was artificial, as the painting was already promised to Emile Schuffenecker. It was intended to discourage other buyers.<sup>12</sup>

Gauguin's selection also reflected his stylistic development over the previous two years and his search for fresh pictorial forms to supplant impressionism. With his new synthetic works he intended to break the dominance of the neo-impressionists: 'For several years the Vingtistes invited Signac, Dubois, etc. and didn't even know that I existed. That doesn't make me feel any more humiliated. To make up for it, I've received a very flattering letter of invitation this year, and I'm going to organize a serious exhibition in Brussels, in opposition to the little dot.'<sup>13</sup>

But Gauguin was unsuccessful. Although the art critics' reviews in 1889 were in general much more favourable to the Salon des Vingt than in the past, their discussion focused, as in the previous two years, on neo-impressionist artists and their divisionist works. In 1887, for his debut at Les Vingt, Seurat had exhibited *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884-86, Art Institute, Chicago), and since then a number of Belgian artists had adopted his technique. At the sixth Salon Seurat exhibited *The models* (1887-88, Barnes Collection, Merion), while Pissarro showed his *Apple picking* (1888, Museum of Fine Art, Dallas). Eight more French and



3. Paul Gauguin, *Among the mangoes at Martinique*, 1887, oil on canvas, 89×116 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; W 224/WN 250

Belgian artists, including Anna Boch and Henry van de Velde, showed pointillist paintings. Even the exhibition poster (ill. 2), designed by Theo van Rysselberghe, was covered programmatically with little dots. Madeleine Maus characterized the situation in her memoirs: ‘To a certain extent the public seems to have resigned itself to divisionist painting and to have calmed down about pointillism. But into this calm pond a heavy stone has been dropped: Paul Gauguin.’<sup>14</sup>

#### Critical reception of Gauguin’s exhibits

Gauguin’s works caused a stir, and the public was as hostile as the press: ‘Among all the exhibitors Mr. Paul Gauguin [sic] is the one who has succeeded in bringing the public to the highest pitch of hilarity. In front of his row of a dozen canvases [...] there is an incessant buzz of human stupidity, breaking out, from time to time, into bursts of laughter.’<sup>15</sup> A cartoon published in *Le Patriote illustré* mocked Gauguin’s *Among the mangoes at Martinique* and exhibits by other painters (ill. 4).



4. *L'art décadent à l'exposition des XX*; cartoon in *Le Patriote illustré*, 10 March 1889. Bibliothèque royale, Brussels. Gauguin's *Among the mangoes at Martinique* appears at an angle at the lower right.

Part of the press simply ignored Gauguin or just mentioned his name. Some reviewers did not differentiate among the group of intransigent artists fighting for 'new art' and named Gauguin in the same breath as Seurat, Pissarro, Luce, Steer and Monet.<sup>16</sup> Other critics struck a much more negative and aggressive note. Gauguin was accused of poking fun at the spectators: 'People infer from his *Vision of the sermon* symbolized by the wrestling bout of Jacob and the Angel on a vermillion field that the artist has presumptuously intended to mock the visitors.'<sup>17</sup> Among all the published reviews this summary by Octave Maus is the only passage that explicitly mentions *Vision of the sermon* when it was exhibited in public for the first time.

But several reviewers must have had *Vision of the sermon* at the back of their minds or have been thinking about *Breton boys wrestling* (1888, Josefowitz Collection; W 273/WN 298) when they linked Gauguin's work to Japanese art. One of the anonymous comments even sounds quite favourable: 'Here are the enticing landscapes of Gauguin, who is much haunted by the obsession with Japanese art.'<sup>18</sup> The critic of *L'Indépendance belge* voiced his irritation thus: 'Even more strange [than Seurat] are the paintings of Mr. Paul Ganguin [sic] from Arles, who applies certain techniques taken from Japanese art to European and contemporary subjects, to the point where we wonder what we are really seeing, and look on in astonishment at this row of frames exhibiting the results of this admittedly highly original system.'<sup>19</sup> The art historian and critic Alphonse-Jules Wauters was less polite: 'Gauguin. – a newcomer whose "I don't give a damn" attitude really goes beyond the acceptable. A pupil of the school of Yedo.'<sup>20</sup>

Gauguin's search for primitive expression in his painting had led him to Japanese prints for inspiration. Emile Bernard claimed later that Gauguin's Jacob and the Angel were 'two wrestlers borrowed from a Japanese album'.<sup>21</sup> The reviewers were unanimous in noting the formal parallels. Their sensibility for Asian art was stimulated by an exhibition of Japanese art organized by Siegfried Bing at the Brussels Cercle artistique et littéraire concurrently with the Salon des Vingt,<sup>22</sup> but the critics not only noticed the influence of Japanese art in Gauguin's paintings, they also found points of comparison between the two shows in general.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from *Vision of the sermon*, the painting *Blue trees* (ill. 1), exhibited in Brussels under the title *Vous y passerez, la belle!* ('Your turn will come, pretty one!'), provoked the most caustic comments: '[...] Sauguin [sic], hanging by his feet from a horizontal rail, revealed a flushed and delirious face in which a pair of blue spectacles made what looked like two deep holes. It was in this position that he did his painting. Hence I was able to guess the secret of his staggering canvases.'<sup>24</sup> Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to read into the 'flushed face' a final allusion to the red background of *Vision of the sermon*. Other reviewers remained rather more objective and concentrated their criticism on Gauguin's colour



symbolism. His non-naturalist colouring had been a point of critical discussion during the years in which his works had been shown at the impressionist exhibitions. The novelist Marguerite van de Wiele could not understand why Gauguin had painted blue trunks:

But even more staggering than this English artist Steer [...] and less admissible as he does not know how to draw, is a Mr. Gauguin from Arles. He evokes for us a plantation of trees whose trunks are blue ..., and we are not talking about that indecisive, vague and blurred blue one sees at twilight: an uncompromising, hard, terrible blue, one which I would go so far as to claim no one has ever seen on any tree trunk, at any time, anywhere in the world.<sup>25</sup>

Octave Maus referred to this criticism, that Gauguin did not have the most elementary notions of colour, in his article,<sup>26</sup> but, in contrast to all the other critics, he concluded with a positive interpretation of Gauguin's works:

I admit in all humility my sincere admiration for Mr Gauguin, one of the most refined colourists I know of and an artist completely free of the tricks one usually finds with painters. I am attracted by the primitive quality of his paintings as well as by his charming harmonies. [...] Not one of them [the paintings] has been understood by the public, which is a guarantee. They are all praised by Degas, which must greatly console the painter for the ironic echoes of the reviews reaching his ears.<sup>27</sup>

Maus concluded that the lack of recognition for Gauguin's skills was due to the public's failure to understand his paintings, and he gave this a positive interpretation: only artist colleagues were able to recognize and appreciate the value of Gauguin's works. But even Maus admitted that he preferred the impressionist landscapes like *Spring at Lézaven* (1888, Private collection; W 249/WN 279) and *Conversation in the pasture, Pont-Aven* (ill. 5). Belgian art critics did not, however, reject all symbolist art works on principle. As long as they remained attached to naturalistic representation, like those by Félicien Rops, Max Klinger and Fernand Khnopff, they received positive reviews. But as soon as artists turned to a more abstract use of form and colour, the limits of understanding were quickly reached, as can also be seen in the case of James Ensor.

Gauguin had hoped that his works would be a great success in Brussels.<sup>28</sup> At the close of the exhibition he was disappointed. Only one canvas, *Conversation in the pasture, Pont-Aven*, was sold – to the Belgian artist Anna Boch. Furthermore, the hostile reviews showed him that the public was not yet ready for an open debate on his newest works from Brittany and Arles. He had lost his 'great struggle' to conquer the public.<sup>29</sup>

The next time Gauguin exhibited his paintings was at the *Exposition de peintures du groupe impressionniste et synthétiste* in summer 1889. Several pictures that had been shown in Brussels were included in this show at the Café des Arts owned by M. Volpini on the grounds of the Exposition Universelle in Paris, but Gauguin did not include *Vision of the sermon* or *Blue trees*. It could be that the article by Octave Maus published in the Paris journal *La Cravache*, which reported the outrage caused by these pictures at Les Vingt, discouraged Gauguin from showing them again in Paris. Another possible reason might be that Gauguin feared a confrontation with the paintings of Bernard, who also participated in this exhibition.

#### Eighth Salon des Vingt (1891)

Despite the negative reception Gauguin had received at Les Vingt in 1889, the group invited him back two years later. When the eighth Salon des Vingt opened its doors in Brussels on 8 February 1891, a new category of works made its



5. Paul Gauguin,  
*Conversation in the  
pasture, Pont-Aven, 1888*,  
oil on canvas, 92 × 73 cm.  
Musées royaux des  
Beaux-Arts de Belgique,  
Brussels; W 250/WN 280

appearance alongside the paintings and sculptures. The ceramic panels by Willy Finch, posters by Jules Chéret and Walter Crane's children's books that were on display meant that the decorative arts had successfully found their way into the Salon des Vingt. Gauguin was represented by his two coloured wood panels, *Be in love, and you will be happy* (see p. 42, ill. 7) and *Be mysterious* (see p. 43, ill. 8), the glazed stoneware statuette *Eve* (ill. 6) and three ceramic vases that belonged to Emile Schuffenecker. Gauguin placed a very high price, 2,000 francs, on the wood panels, while *Eve* was priced at 1,000 francs. A third wooden relief, not listed in the catalogue, may also have been included in the exhibition.<sup>30</sup>

Even if sculpture occupied an important place in Gauguin's oeuvre, it seems astonishing that these were the only works he exhibited and that he asked such a high price for them. Was it that he wanted to present himself as a sculptor in view of the outrage caused by his paintings in 1889? Or did he want to reserve his pictures for the auction at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris, hoping to be able to get a better price there? This took place on 23 February 1891 and was intended to finance his first voyage to Tahiti. Or was he just following the demands of the Belgian

6. Paul Gauguin, *Eve*, 1890,  
glazed stoneware, ht: 60 cm.  
National Gallery of Art,  
Washington; G 92





organizers? In a letter he told his friend Schuffenecker: 'Those shrewd devils Signac and Co. invited me solely for my sculptures, fearful of the way my painting was developing.'<sup>31</sup>

Gauguin's works were shown together with the paintings of Vincent van Gogh, to whom the exhibition paid a last respect. Octave Maus summed up the response: 'The battle was mainly waged around the works of Gauguin and Van Gogh. [...] The sculptures of Gauguin, the decorative paintings and drawings of Van Gogh caused a great outcry, as did *Le chahut* by Seurat [1889-90, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum].'<sup>32</sup> One of the first reviews written by Paul de Vigne divided the exhibitors into three different categories: 'The reasonable ones; the purely extravagant ones; the fantasists who have things in common with the first two groups. [...] The sculptors all belong to the first category, the reasonable ones, except Mr. Paul Gouguin [sic] who is a fantasist: he has talent, elegance; his bas-reliefs are eccentric.'<sup>33</sup>

In this quite positive comment De Vigne intentionally draws a distinction between Gauguin's ceramics and his wooden reliefs, a distinction also made by other art critics at that time. While his statuette was praised, the panels caused great outrage<sup>34</sup> and were even perceived as pornography. Achille Chainaye, a former member of Les Vingt was up in arms: 'Mr. Gauguin has undertaken erotico-enigmatic sculptures à la Seurat.' And a week later he characterized his colleague: 'Gauguin, the pornographic image maker whose sublime ignorance surpasses even the sculptors of the Black Forest!'<sup>35</sup>

Chainaye's comparison to popular carving reflects the discussion that had broken out about Gauguin's works that year. The authors referred to his oeuvre as 'primitive' and 'savage' and declared that Gauguin had been influenced by numerous styles – although the region and period of art varied depending on the reviewer: 'Joking apart, this Cambodian, Indo-Chinese or even Congolese sculptor has found a new note worthy of being understood and admired by the last wild inhabitants of the world.'<sup>36</sup> If the critics agreed on the relation of Gauguin's art to foreign and former civilizations, they differed completely in their assessment of this influence. Several of them doubted Gauguin's intentions, seeing his recourse to primitive forms as insincere.

### Gauguinism

Only a few critics, like the poet Emile Verhaeren, considered Gauguin's works an appropriate mode for the maintenance or even the renewal of contemporary art:

Our art has become bored with itself, and in order to renew itself it returns to its sources, it soaks itself again in naiveties and infancies. [...] This same return to its sources is manifest in literature [...]. It seems to me that Gauguin's wood

carvings [...] are far from chance creations. They appear on the contrary to express the future. They are the step back that enables us to catch our breath and leap forward.<sup>37</sup>

Other authors also saw the necessity of renewal, but they did not concede that Gauguin was on the right track:

Mr. Gauguin has gone to immense trouble to unlearn an art he has studied – as is witnessed by some of his ceramic modelling, and he has started again for himself the development of ages. Art is perpetual renovation as well as perpetual continuation. Mr. Gauguin does not seem to have the intellectual vigour of true and creative innovators. Although he is enough of an artist to be nauseated by the banalities that surround him, this quality is not sufficient for him to surmount them with viable creations.<sup>38</sup>

Verhaeren's opinion was supported by an important article printed the same day in *La Gazette*. Its author, Wauters, who in 1889 had insulted Gauguin by calling him a pupil of the school of Yedo, this year pleaded in his favour. He tried to explain the reasons for Gauguin's stylistic development and found them based not only on his personality, 'one of the most original artists', but also initiated by the official art of his time:

This return to the barbarism of primitive people can only be explained as a protest against the countless flat and empty products to be seen in official exhibitions which win easy admiration and open the purses of the public. Maybe it can also be explained by the intimate and uncommon desire to assert that, despite an offensive and harsh outward appearance, the author is capable of expressing an artistic feeling simply through the striking of an attitude, however stiff it may be, or through the unique character of an expression, however brutal it may be, or again thanks to a glaze or harmonious polychromy.<sup>39</sup>

Wauters's contribution provoked strong reactions. The artist and writer Théo Hannon published in *La Chronique* an article entitled 'Le Vingtisme' and he coined a name for the style delineated by Wauters:

Gauguinism grafted on Vingtism, this is the principle. [...] Gauguinism, great art that shows us repulsive, scarcely human beings, whose dislocated and monstrous forms recall certain barbaric divinities, or the crude attempts of artists who have only just emerged from the caverns of primitive times. This at least is the opinion of the *Gazette*. [...] Will this system be applied to literature? Is it possible that we will soon have a school of writers who know nothing of

plaire à M. Woeste l'émotion sentiment.

du parti catholique est pour, par un de ses orateurs, M. Van Doorslaer :

« quoique revisionniste et etc », défendra l'ordre du jour à la dernière séance.

Jourdhui la question du suffrage universel après Pâques (!?) n'est-elle pas la question du suffrage ?

On conservatrice de Gand, il a dit un jour banal que j'ai voté la nécessité politique que par

mort dans l'âme ! (Rires.)

« — Nous pouvons avoir con-

aer a confiance dans le sans savoir quelle est la situation. C'est plus que de la foi aveugle. in a des scrupules :

« — dit-il, répondre à la Fédération des associations politiques

se prononcer sur des ques-

« exige que l'Association con-

les, la première du pays, ait le Cercle de Couvin, de Flo-

mont on nous oppose les de-

voit et le devoir de dire que

in ordre du jour impli-

ntervient M. Jourdain,

« te de transaction (!!!),

ax ordre du jour que

« firme le vote de la précédente

« on conservatrice ne repousse

articles 47 et 53 de la Consti-

« le comité se rallie à cet ord-

encore le bon toutou à

accentue la reculade en

« u que l'ordre du jour ne spé-

« blée se prononce en faveur de

« orne à affirmer la liberté des

« (Applaudissements.)

« urte discussion et une

tants, il est la seule solution logique et, par conséquent, inévitable.

T. N.

## GAUGUINISME LITTÉRAIRE

Cela ne pouvait manquer, par ce temps où les choses de l'esprit se font à la vapeur : un éditeur, enthousiaste de l'art primitif, publiera incessamment un roman illustré, œuvre d'un écrivain qui salt à peine signer son nom. Les gravures, exécutées sur des morceaux de bois bruts, au moyen d'un couteau aussi ébréché qu'inexpérimenté, seront imprimées, à la paume de la main, sur du papier à chandelle qui aura déjà servi.

Grâce à l'indiscrétion d'un typographe, que nous avons corrompu sans vergogne, nous pouvons reproduire la première page de ce roman à sensation. Il est intitulé : *Istoirt din mariache*, et commence comme suit :

« Quan nin chevan put i sut et quan nin jonhom est amoureu gnia rin qui fe fo quene fie ipace din nin bo ou dinin pachi sa ne fe rin ou sulhor din fosset.

(Ici une gravure à faire rougir un navet.)

« Jine ne poven pu. I faleu ! Ji coureu so napret Catrin da chestiat jine travaieu pu jim foutou de prone ane pu vir clèr jime bastien avou tertout pou rin e jastrapeu de tognol a me rind malat... tout-el nutée jasteu a waiti li ferniese de Catrin in m disan : pouquet es qui ji ne seu ni a doirmi avou ? e in m disan soula ji devneu com inragi et ji mecoureu in crian quon pinseu quel feu asteu a m maisone.

(Ici, gravure composée au moyen de cinq traits et d'un point noir, représentant le héros fuyant en s'arrachant les cheveux.)

« In jou ji rveneu deché m matante in gueulant com in viau quan au quoint del ruail jim boutou cont Catrin...

« Non di diou !

« Jine fe ni leune ni deuse jim mfou dsu ei sarèt e m tap es pougn su mgueul.

(Ici, gravure imitée de la « Mystérieuse » de M. Gauguin : on voit la gueule du héros, très ressemblante.)

« Sa sit en batale ! ! El asteu pu forte que mi e ma foutu ene doublur carabinee. Troe moe napret on no za maril.

(Ici, portrait de la mariée imité de l'« Amoureuse » de M. Gauguin.)

« E voi ce qui arivat in jou que no... »

Là s'arrête la première page, que nous dédions aux gauguinistes. Nous rendrons compte de ce roman, qui ne peut manquer de faire grande sensation et que nous recommandons tout spécialement à la *Gazette*.

Notre agent dépositaire de la *Cronique à Londres* est M. J. Demathé. On trouvera notre journal : 39, Old Compton street, Soho ; 9, Coventry ;

Nouveaux trams. — L de Bruxelles-Nord à Bruxelles en circulation. Ils sont élégamment obtenus immédiatement un gr

Les neutres. — Je ne méprisais que l'homme qui convictions.

On peut estimer, en le co-

ciste qui, bravement et net

Idées et fait de la propagand

Mais, sous prétexte d'imp

tralité, faire des avances à

sauf à ne se voir accueilli par

et répugnant métier !

Malheureusement pour le

compte parmi ses adhérent

avoués ou inavoués pas mal

sonnages. C'est là le secret d

C'est ce qu'ont bien com

orateurs qui, aux dernières

ciation conservatrice, ont t

voter une décision nette et é

Ils ont succombé à la t

Nous pourrions nous réjou

si l'intérêt de notre parti nou

L'attitude de l'association

perdre toute influence dans l

Il est cependant triste de c

ment de ce qui fut un grand

Au Cercle artistique.

Waux-Hall a fait toiles neu

M. Valckenaere, aux chie

Eycken ont succédé les œuv

laye et Lucien Franck, un pe

syntax, grammar and spelling? [...] If so, it will be sufficient to be completely ignorant and to possess an enormous dose of vanity to be a great artist or a great writer. There is an air of madness about...<sup>40</sup>

The next day the same newspaper offered a first sample of literary *Gauguinisme* (ill. 7). The love story bears the title 'Istoirt din mariache' ('Story of a wedding'). The trivial and amusing romance casts a ridiculous light on the artist whose name is used for the newly created term. The author used a dialect of French-speaking Walloons, mixing it up with expressions from other regions and imaginary words, ignoring all orthographical and grammatical rules.<sup>41</sup> In his opinion this was consistent with the principals of Gauguin's art. He therefore suggested it would be fitting to illustrate the text with woodcuts by Gauguin.

Other reviewers too saw a correspondence between incomplete syntax, faulty grammar and wrong spelling in literature and defective stylistic elements in Gauguin's art: 'No more lines, forms, colours.'<sup>42</sup> As in 1889, the main focus of criticism was again Gauguin's unconventional use of formal elements. In 1891, however, this was understood not as a result of the artist's inability to observe nature accurately and transpose it intelligibly into art. It was the outcome of his intentional recourse to ancient and foreign art forms to move contemporary art forward and thus deserved a proper label: Gauguinism. The favourable and insightful reviews of Verhaeren and Wauters indicate that Gauguin's ideas had become more acceptable in the two years since his last exhibition with Les Vingt.

At the same time that Belgian art critics were naming a stylistic movement after Gauguin, his painting *Vision of the sermon* became celebrated in Paris. At the auction held at the Hôtel Drouot in February 1891 it received the highest bid. Its sale to Henri Meilheurat des Pruraux for the impressive sum of 900 francs was acknowledged with applause. Furthermore it was the principal subject of the important article by Albert Aurier, 'Le symbolisme en peinture. Paul Gauguin',<sup>43</sup> although this appeared in the March issue of *Mercure de France*, too late to influence the result of the auction. Just as Belgian critics had linked formal elements of Gauguin's art to modern writing and observed a connection between contemporary visual arts and avant-garde literature, French symbolist writers had looked for a long time for a counterpart in fine arts and music for the presentation of their aesthetical principles. Aurier proclaimed Gauguin *the symbolist artist* and *Vision of the sermon the symbolist work of art par excellence*.

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7. 'Gauguinisme littéraire: Histoire d'une marriage', *La Chronique*, 24 February 1891. Bibliothèque royale, Brussels

## NOTES

This essay was first presented as a paper at the conference *Gauguin's 'Vision of the sermon': Interpretation, reception, conservation* held at the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 30 September-1 October 2005. For their help in translating the French quotations, I wish to thank Belinda Thomson and Edelgard and Bernard Riddoch.

1. G.-Albert Aurier, 'Le symbolisme en peinture. Paul Gauguin', *Mercur de France* 18, no. 15 (March 1891), p. 155-65.
2. Victor Merlhès (ed.), *Paul Gauguin et Vincent van Gogh, 1887-1888, Lettres retrouvées, sources ignorées*, Taravao 1989, letter 43, p. 264.
3. Letter from Theo van Gogh to Gauguin, 13 November 1888: 'Degas est si enthousiaste de vos œuvres qu'il en parle à beaucoup de monde & qu'il va acheter la toile [...].' ('Degas is so enthusiastic about your work that he talks to many people about it and is going to buy the painting [...].') Victor Merlhès (ed.), *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: Documents, témoignages: 1873-1888*, Paris 1984, letter XCIII, p. 280. Degas did not in the end buy the painting *Spring at Lézaven* (W 249/WN 279). Degas was asked to participate at the Salon des Vingt in 1886, 1887 and 1888, but each time he declined the invitation; see Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque, exhib. cat. *Les XX et La Libre Esthétique: Cent ans après*, Brussels (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique) 1993, pp. 28, 35, 43.
4. Sven Lövgren, *The genesis of modernism: Seurat, Gauguin, van Gogh & French symbolism in the 1880's*, Stockholm & Uppsala 1959, p. 99. *L'Art Moderne* had been founded in 1881 by the two lawyers Edmond Picard and Octave Maus.
5. Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh, 27 October 1888: 'A Bruxelles j'ai fait connaissance avec le fils de de Groux [Henry], qui lui aussi est artiste. [...] Le mouvement qui se fait ici en art paraît très discuté mais aussi approuvé là-bas & il serait bon de créer à Bruxelles aussi une exposition permanente.' ('In Brussels I met the son of De Groux [Henry], who is also an artist. [...] The movement that is underway here in art is the subject of a lot

of argument but also approval over there and it would be good to establish a permanent exhibition in Brussels as well.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter LXXXVII, p. 265. Henry de Groux resigned from Les Vingt in 1890 because he refused to exhibit in the same room as Vincent van Gogh: '[...] ne voulant pas quant à moi, me trouver dans la même salle que l'inénarrable [sic] pot de soleils de monsieur Vincent, ou de tout autre agent provocateur.' ('[...] as I was not prepared to appear in the same room as the indescribable pot of sunflowers by M. Vincent, or by any other agent provocateur.') Ollinger-Zinque, *Les XX*, p. 51. It was probably Theo who transmitted the invitation to Gauguin a few weeks later.

6. 'Notre mouvement s'accroît de plus en plus aussi bien à l'étranger qu'en France et je suis sûr qu'un jour viendra où nous serons tous hors d'affaire. [...] Nous sommes invités à Bruxelles, probablement aussi à Glasgow [sic].' Letter from Gauguin to Mette, first week of January 1888, Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 138, p. 168.
7. Letter from Gauguin to Octave Maus, last week (24) November 1888: 'J'accepte votre invitation aux Vingtistes, et vous remercie de l'honneur qui m'est fait. Je donnerai à Mr Van Gogh les instructions nécessaires pour l'envoi des toiles avec le catalogue.' ('I accept your invitation to the Vingtistes and thank you for thus honouring me. I shall give Mr. Van Gogh the necessary instructions for the transportation of the paintings and for the catalogue.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 185, p. 291.
8. Letter from Theo van Gogh to Gauguin, 13 November 1888: '[...] j'avais déjà fait mettre toutes les toiles sur châssis à clefs & j'ai pris pour montrer les toiles de 30 un très beau cadre blanc & bois naturel dans lequel ils font très bien.' ('I had already had all the canvases put on stretchers & I chose for the 30 format canvases a really beautiful white and natural wood frame, in which they look very good.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter XCIII, p. 280.
9. 'En son ingénuité, Gauguin ne pouvait concevoir qu'on exposât ses toiles dans un édifice officiel.' Octave Maus, 'La Lanterne Magique', *Revue de Belles-Lettres* 55, 1927, p. 207; cited in Jane Block, 'Les XX and La Libre Esthétique', in Mary Anne Stevens and Robert Hoozee, exhib. cat. *Impressionism to symbolism: The Belgian avant-garde 1880-1990*, London

(Royal Academy of Arts) 1994, p. 43. The Musée de Peinture was located in the Palais de Charles de Lorraine, which today houses the Musée du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (part of the Bibliothèque Royale). The works were hung with care above the rail level, arranged by artist, as opposed to the installation at the official Salons, where the paintings were put together by size, hanging in total disorder one above another. Gauguin relied on Maus for the advantageous placing of his contribution to the exhibition. Letter from Gauguin to Octave Maus, last week (24) November 1888: 'Je ne pourrais m'occuper moi-même du placement des toiles et suis persuadé que vous me remplacerez avantagement pour cette opération.' ('I couldn't be involved myself in the placing of the paintings, but I am certain it will be to my advantage if you will stand in for me for this process.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 185, p. 291.

10. Following the order of the list send to Octave Maus in December 1888 the pictures can be identified as: *Among the mangoes (Tropics)* (W 224/WN 250); *Conversation (Tropics)* (W 227/WN 251); *Spring at Lézaven* (W 249/WN 279); *Breton boy and cow* (W 258/WN 273); *Conversation in the pasture, Pont-Aven* (W 250/WN 280); *Breton boys wrestling* (W 273/WN 298); *Vision of the sermon* (W 245/WN 308); *In the heat* (W 301/WN 320); *Human miseries* (W 304/WN 317); *At the presbytery of Pont-Aven* (W 204/WN 228); *Arles landscape* (W 309/WN 323); *Blue trees* (W 311/WN 319). Letter from Gauguin to Octave Maus, second or third week of December 1888, Archives de l'Art Contemporain en Belgique (inv. no. AACB 5225), reprinted in Françoise Dumont et al., exhib. cat. *Gauguin: Les XX et La Libre Esthétique*, Liège (Musée d'Art moderne et d'Art contemporain) 1994, p. 15.

11. Letter from Gauguin to Theo van Gogh, 27 October 1888: 'Je compte que vous serez content des tableaux de Pont-Aven, le plus important viendra avec Bernard.' ('I trust you will be happy with the paintings from Pont-Aven, the most important one will come with Bernard.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 175, p. 266. Letter from Gauguin to Emile Bernard, second week of November 1888: 'C'est ma meilleure toile de cette année et aussitôt qu'elle sera sèche je l'enverrai à Paris.' ('This is the best painting I have done this year and as soon as it has dried I will send it to Paris.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 179, p. 275.

12. Letter from Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, 22 December 1888: 'Par exemple je vous le demanderai pour l'exposition de Bruxelles, et je le mettrai à un haut prix relatif 2000 F. Comme celà [sic] nous serons sûr qu'on ne le prendra pas.' ('I will probably ask you for it for the Brussels exhibition and I will ask a relatively high price of 2,000 francs. By doing this we will be sure that nobody will buy it.') Merlhès, *Paul Gauguin et Vincent van Gogh*, p. 239. Gauguin also explained to Schuffenecker how he wanted the painting to be framed and labelled: 'Vous lui mettrez [sic] un cadre très simple plat en bois noirci comme les tables d'ébène, et le bord touchant le tableau jaune de chrome à la colle. Avec une étiquette en cuivre et les initiales [18 PGO 88] gravées.' ('You should give it a very simple flat frame in wood stained black like an ebony table, and the edge next to the painting should be chrome yellow size. With a copper label engraved with the initials [18 PGO 88]'). In the letter from Gauguin to Octave Maus (second or third week of December 1888, inv. no. AACB 5225, reprinted in Dumont, *Gauguin*, p. 15) he first fixed the price for *Human miseries* at 2,000 francs, then amended it to 2,500, finally bringing it down to 1,500 francs.

13. 'Depuis plusieurs années les Vingtistes invitaient Signac Dubois etc. et ne me connaissaient même pas. Je n'en suis pas humilié pour celà [sic]. En revanche j'ai reçu une lettre très flatteuse pour m'inviter cette année et je vais organiser à Bruxelles une exposition sérieuse en opposition avec le petit point.' Letter from Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, 22 November 1888, Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 184, p. 290.

14. 'Le public, dans une certaine mesure, semble se résigner à la peinture divisée, se remettre des émotions du pointillé. Mais dans la mare un pavé tombe: Paul Gauguin.' Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art: Les XX, La Libre Esthétique 1884-1914*, Brussels 1980, p. 19.

15. 'De tous les exposants, celui qui a le privilège d'exciter au plus haut degré le ricanement de la foule, c'est M. PAUL GAUGUIN [sic]. C'est devant la douzaine de toiles qu'il aligne [...] l'incessant bourdonnement de la bêtise humaine montant, parfois, jusqu'aux éclats de rire.' Octave Maus, 'Le Salon des XX à Bruxelles: V<sup>le</sup> Exposition annuelle', *La Cravache* 9, no. 419 (2 March 1889), p. 1.

16. *Le Soir*, 21 February 1889: 'Gauguin, (un nom nouveau) qui n'a moins de douze tableau, paysages et compositions symboliques.' ('Gauguin, (a new name) showing no fewer than twelve pictures, landscapes and symbolic compositions.') Jules and Georges Destrée, 'Le Salon des XX', *La Jeune Belgique* 8, no. 2 (February 1889), p. 73, also treated Gauguin as part of the neo-impressionist group: 'L'école néo-impressionniste est en faveur marquée. L'an passée ce fut déjà une invasion bruyante de Français dont les prétentions dépassaient sensiblement le génie; cela s'accroît encore. Anquetin était curieux, vraiment apporteur de neuf, du neuf pris aux Japonais, mais que dire de Gauguin! Que dire de Luce, de Besnard, de Cross, et autres Nêlaton! Camille Pissarro est vulgaire; Tholen, Stott et Claude Monet sont représentés par des œuvres inférieures; Seurat est le plus intéressant de tous.' ('The neo-impressionist school is decidedly in favour. In the past year there has already been a noisy invasion of Frenchmen whose pretensions far outstrip their genius; and now this is still more pronounced. Anquetin was interesting, really with something new to contribute, something new taken from the Japanese, but what can one say about Gauguin! Or about Luce, Besnard, Cross and others like Nêlaton! Camille Pissarro is common; Tholen, Stott and Claude Monet are represented by inferior works; Seurat is the most interesting of all of them.')  
 17. 'Ton infère d'une *Vision du Sermon* symbolisée par le combat de Jacob et de l'Ange luttant sur un pré vermillon que l'artiste a voulu se moquer outrecuidamment des visiteurs.' Maus, 'Le Salon des XX', p. 1.  
 18. 'Voici les alléchants paysages de Gauguin, très poursuivi, lui, par le japonisme.' *L'Escaut*, 5 February 1889, cited in Dumont, *Gauguin*, p. 16.  
 19. 'Plus étranges encore [que Seurat] sont les peintures de M. Paul Ganguin [sic], d'Arles, qui applique certains procédés de l'art japonais à des sujets européens et contemporains, si bien qu'on ne sait vraiment ce qu'on voit, et qu'on regarde avec ébahissement la série de cadres où sont exposés les produits de ce système assurément fort original. L'originalité est souvent ce qu'on cherche avant tout; ici elle est incontestablement trouvée.' 'Bruxelles: Le Salon des Vingt', *L'Indépendance belge*, 4 February 1889, p. 26.  
 20. 'Gauguin. — Un nouveau venu dont le «je

m'enfoutisme» dépasse quelque peu les bornes de la permission. Elève de l'école de Yédo.' A. J. Wauters, 'Aux XX', *La Gazette*, 2 February 1889, p. 10. Tokyo was known as Yédo until 1868.  
 21. 'deux lutteurs empruntés à un album japonais.' Emile Bernard, 'Notes sur l'école dite de "Pont-Aven"', *Mercure de France* 48, no. 168 (December 1903), p. 680.  
 22. In *La Jeune Belgique* 8, no. 2 (February 1889) the review of 'Le Salon des XX' is directly followed by an article on 'L'imagerie japonaise'.  
 23. 'Les Vingt ne venaient qu'affubler de Japon de la mode européenne, sans atteindre cependant à l'originalité et au caractère, qui ne sont pas objets d'importation.' ('The Vingt only managed to dress European style up in Japanese garb, but without capturing the originality and character of Japan, which are not things that can be imported.') Victor Arnold, 'Modernisme et Japonisme', *La Nation*, 11 February 1889; quoted in Susan Marie Canning, *A History and Critical Review of the Salons of 'Les Vingt', 1884-1893*, Ann Arbor & London 1980, pp. 219-22.  
 24. 'Sauguin [sic], suspendu par les pieds à une tringle horizontale, montrait une face congestionnée et délirante où une paire de lunettes bleues faisait comme deux trous profonds. Il peignait dans cette attitude. Je devinais, dès lors, le secret de ses toiles renversantes.' N. Sancho, 'Au Salon des XX', *Le Capitan*, 3 March 1889, p. 4.  
 25. 'Mais plus ahurissant que cet Anglais Steer [...] et moins excusable car il ne sait pas dessiner, est un M. Gauguin, d'Arles; lequel évoque, pour nous, un site planté d'arbres dont les troncs sont bleus..., et non pas de ce bleu indécis, vague et flou que le crépuscule répand, le soir, sur les objets: d'un bleu franc, dur, terrible et tel enfin que personne, j'ose l'affirmer n'en a jamais observé de pareil sur aucun tronc d'arbre, en aucun temps, sous aucune zone.' Marguerite van de Wiele, 'Le Salon des XX', *Le Journal de l'Office de Publicité*, February 1889, p. 20.  
 26. 'De ce qu'un paysage montre des troncs d'arbres bleus et un ciel jaune, on conclut que M. Gauguin ne possède pas les plus élémentaires notions de coloris.' [...] ('From the fact that a landscape shows blue tree trunks and a yellow sky, the conclusion is drawn that M. Gauguin does not have the most elementary notions of colour.'). Maus, 'Le Salon des XX', p. 1.  
 27. 'J'avoue humblement ma sincère



admiration pour M. Gauguin, l'un des coloristes les plus raffinés que je connaisse, et le peintre le plus dénoué des trucs coutumiers qui soit. Le primitif de ses peintures m'attire, au même degré que le charme de ses harmonies. [...] Aucune [toile] n'a été comprise du public, ce qui est une garantie. Toutes sont louées par Degas, ce qui doit singulièrement consoler le peintre des appréciations dont l'écho ironique lui sonne aux oreilles.' Ibid.

28. In December 1888 he wrote to his wife Mette: 'En tous cas ma réputation s'établit solidement tant à Paris qu'à Bruxelles. [...] Il est probable que cet hiver j'enverrai [argent] encore si mon exposition à Bruxelles [...] marche bien comme il est probable.' ('In any case I am getting a solid reputation in both Paris and Brussels. [...] It's likely I shall send [money] again this winter if my exhibition in Brussels [...] goes well as seems likely.') Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 190, p. 300.

29. 'grande lutte'. Letter from Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, 22 November 1888, Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 184, p. 291.

30. Some reviewers mentioned a third wooden relief, *Des Negresses*. This may possible be *Les martiniquaises* (Whereabouts unknown, G 73). Pierre-M. Olin, 'Les XX', *Mercur de France*, no. 16, vol. 2, April 1891, p. 236, and A. J. Wauters, 'Aux XX', *La Gazette*, 20 February 1891.

31. 'les malins Signac et Cie m'avaient invité pour ma sculpture seulement craignant mon évolution picturale.' Letter from Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, 31 January 1891, Victor Merlhès (ed.), *De Bretagne en Polynésie. Paul Gauguin. Pages inédites*, Papeete 1995, p. 73.

32. 'C'est principalement autour de Gauguin et de Van Gogh que s'est engagé la bataille. [...] les sculptures de Gauguin, les toiles décoratives et les dessins de Van Gogh ont soulevé des clameurs, de même que le *Chahut*, de Seurat [...]' Octave Maus, 'Courier de Belgique', *L'Art dans les Deux Mondes*, 21 March 1891, p. 216.

33. 'Les raisonnables; Les extravagants purs; Les fantaisistes qui tiennent des deux premières classes. [...] Les sculpteurs tiennent tous de la première sorte, les raisonnables, sauf M. Paul Gouguin [sic] qui est fantaisiste: il a du talent, du chic; ses bas-reliefs sont excentriques.' Paul de Vigne, *Nouvelles du jour*, 9 February 1891.

34. Eugène Georges, *Impartial bruxellois*, 22 February 1891; Gustave Lagye, *L'Eventail*,

8 March 1891; V. E., *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 8 March 1891.

35. 'M. Gauguin [...] a entrepris de sculpter à la Seurat des scènes érotico-énigmatiques!'

Achille Chainaye, *La Réforme*, 11 February 1891. 'Gauguin, l'imagier pornographe dont la sublime ignorance n'a jamais été surpassé par les sculpteurs de la Forêt-Noire.' Ibid., 19 February 1891.

36. 'Plaisanterie à part ce sculpteur cambodgien, indo-chinois, ou congolais tout court a trouvé une note nouvelle, digne d'être comprise et admirée par les dernières peuplades sauvage du monde.' Georges Verdavainne, 'L'exposition des XX', *La Fédération artistique* 18, no. 17 (5 February 1891), p. 200.

37. 'Notre art est las de lui-même, et pour se renouveler il retourne aux sources, il se retrempe dans les naïvetés et dans les enfances. [...] En sculpture comme en peinture, la révolution est profonde, radicale, violente. Et ce retour vers les sources se manifeste également en littérature [...]. Il nous paraît, que les bois de M. Gauguin et les plâtres de M. Minne, loin d'être choses de hasard, apparaissent, au contraire, expressifs d'avenir. Ce sont des rejets vers l'arrière pour prendre élan et sauter plus loin.' Emile Verhaeren, 'Aux XX', *La Nation*, 20 February 1891, reprinted in *Ecrits sur l'art: 1881-1916*, ed. Paul Aron, Brussels 1997, p. 399. For a similar opinion, see Emile Verhaeren, 'Chronique artistique: Les XX', *La Société nouvelle* 1, year 7, 28 February 1891, p. 252, quoted in Stevens and Hoozee, *Impressionism to symbolism*, p. 202.

38. 'M. Gauguin se donne une peine immense pour désapprendre un art qu'il a étudié – tels modèles en font foi et recommence pour son compte l'évolution des âges. L'art est une perpétuelle rénovation, mais aussi une continuation perpétuelle. M. Gauguin ne semble pas avoir la santé intellectuelle des vrais et féconds novateurs. Assez artiste pour être éccœuré des banalités ambiantes, il ne semble pas l'être assez pour les dominer par des viables créations.' E. V., 'L'exposition des XX', *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, 8 March 1891. The initials E.V. might suggest (intentionally?) that the author was Emile Verhaeren, but the content excludes this possibility.

39. 'Il [le recul vers la barbarie des primitifs] ne peut s'expliquer que comme une protestation contre les innombrables productions plates et

vides qui emplissent les expositions officielles et conquièrent aisément l'admiration et les billets de banque du public. Il s'explique aussi, peut-être, par le désir intime et pas banal d'affirmer, qu'en dépit d'une enveloppe repoussante et fruste, l'auteur est capable d'exprimer un sentiment d'art par la seule allure d'une attitude quelque ankylosée qu'elle soit, par l'unique caractère d'une expression quelque brutale qu'elle soit, ou encore grâce à un émail ou à une polychromie harmonieuse.' Wauters, 'Aux XX', p. 11. A second article by Wauters adopts the wording of E.V.'s article, but retains his own argument unchanged: 'Fantaisie pittoresque, qu'il faut accepter comme une réaction violente – et foncièrement artistique – contre l'immense et écœurante production de banalités et de niaiseries à laquelle notre civilisation prétendument parfaite [...] ne peut s'empêcher de donner le jour.' ('Picturesque fantasy, that one has to accept as a violent – and fundamentally artistic – reaction against the huge and dispiriting production of banalities and idiocies that our supposedly perfect civilization [...] cannot help bringing forth.') A.-J. Wauters, 'L'exposition des XX', *Magazine littéraire*, Ghent, 15 March 1891, p. 273.

40. 'Le gauguinisme greffé sur le vingtisme, voilà le grand principe. [...] Le grand art, c'est le gauguinisme, qui nous montre des êtres répulsifs, à peine humains, dont les formes disloquées et monstrueuses rappellent certaines divinités barbares, ou les essais grossiers des artistes sortis à peine des cavernes de la première époque. Telle est du moins l'opinion exprimée par la *Gazette*. [...] Et en littérature, ce système ne va-t-il pas être adopté ? N'aurons nous pas bientôt l'école des écrivains qui ne connaissent ni la syntaxe, ni la grammaire, ni l'orthographe ? [...] Il suffira alors d'être profondément ignorant et de posséder une dose énorme de vanité pour être ou un grand artiste, ou un grand écrivain. Un souffle de folie a passé sur le monde...' Théo Hannon, 'Le Vingtisme', *La Chronique*, 23 February 1891.

41. 'Gauguinisme littéraire', *La Chronique*, 24 February 1891. I am grateful to M. R. Pinon, Liège, for the linguistic analysis of this.

42. 'Plus de lignes, de formes, de tons.' Edgar Baes, 'Nos mardis: Les XX', *L'Impartial de Gand*, 24 February 1891. Another critic wrote: 'Ni plans, ni formes, ni proportions, et des prétentions par dessus le marché.'

('Neither plans, nor forms, nor proportions, and pretentious into the bargain.') 'La VIIIe exposition des XX', *L'Etoile belge*, 15 February 1891. Alphonse Germain also drew parallels between linguistic and pictorial syntax: 'C'est [déformer] comme si, en littérature, on supprimait toute syntaxe sous prétexte de conserver aux images plus de naturel et de saveur.' (This [distortion] is as if, in literature, one were to suppress all syntax with the supposed intention of keeping more naturalness and appeal in the images.) Alphonse Germain, 'Théorie des déformateurs', *La Plume*, no. 57, 1 Septembre 1891, p. 289.

43. See n. 1.





# Gauguin's maverick sage: Meijer de Haan

June Hargrove

The Dutch artist Meijer de Haan (generally known by his French friends as Jacob Meyer de Haan) has come into his own a century after his death, with an increasing amount of scholarly attention, which is amplifying our knowledge of the artist while correcting the errors that mar the literature. Since De Haan's story has been told elsewhere, a brief introduction suffices here as a prelude to the investigation of Paul Gauguin's portraits of his friend and their significance in his oeuvre.<sup>1</sup> Gauguin completed six likenesses of the Dutchman, plus a handful of drawings, spanning over a decade, from the time they first knew each other until Gauguin's death in 1903. The recurrence of the portraits, five of which share a common pose, indicates that they carried a meaning for Gauguin that went beyond the record of the appearance of the individual.

This article explores these images to propose insights into the ideas embedded in them and how their content was amplified and transformed over time. The French artist sought to express these ideas in a symbolic vocabulary, inspired by new literary sources, in which traditional iconography was replaced by symbols that suggested correspondences rather than explicit correlations. He envisioned an expressive mode whereby the work's potential meaning opened out from the core of the subject into the spectator's imagination. As he progressed, the

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1. Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of Meijer de Haan with a lamp*, 1889, oil on wood, 80 × 52 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York (Anonymous fractional gift); W 317

representation of De Haan became a kind of talisman to him. Both men suffered from the negative response to their work, even among their peers, and, as they worked together between 1889 and 1891, they struggled to find their own aesthetic way. De Haan became emblematic for Gauguin of the modern artist, rebelling against conventions and striving for a new creative order based on innovation and liberty. His portrait came to serve as a universal sign, an icon substituting for Gauguin himself, to personify the concept of the artist as maverick sage.

De Haan had exchanged his financial interest in the family's profitable biscuit factory in Holland for a fixed income of 300 francs a month, permitting him to pursue his vocation as a painter. After working in a conservative Dutch neo-realist style, he left Amsterdam for Paris, where he fell under the influence of the impressionists. Through his compatriot Theo van Gogh, he met Gauguin early in 1889. That summer he joined the burgeoning circle of artists congregating in Pont-Aven. He moved on to Le Pouldu, where he stayed in the inn kept by Marie Henry, known as Marie *poupée* ('doll') for her physical charms. Despite De Haan's less than seductive physique – in her words 'a slight, rickety, deformed, sickly, almost infirm creature' – they became lovers.<sup>2</sup>

The ties between Meijer de Haan and Gauguin are well documented if not always interpreted from the same perspective. Gauguin joined De Haan in October at Le Pouldu, where the Hollander subsidized his living expenses in exchange for advice about painting. The intellectual exchange was reciprocal, as the master benefited from the pupil's learning.<sup>3</sup> The arrangement seemed to work well. In a letter to Emile Schuffenecker, Gauguin described De Haan as 'my student and a really nice guy'.<sup>4</sup> To Emile Bernard, he wrote that De Haan 'works marvelously well here. He sends you his best wishes.'<sup>5</sup> The two men were at the heart of a small colony of young artists who frequented the auberge for the sake of their company.

After a year of communal living, De Haan left for Paris in October 1890, for reasons that remain unknown, never to see Marie *poupée* again. Nor did he acknowledge their daughter, born in June, 1891, if he knew of her existence. That winter both men stayed in a modest hotel, at 35 rue Delambre in Paris, still dreaming of a 'studio of the tropics', but Gauguin departed for the South Pacific alone in the spring. Almost two years later he wrote to his wife that life in Tahiti would have been better if his friend had accompanied him, especially to talk about art.<sup>6</sup> His efforts to reach his old friend came to naught.<sup>7</sup> De Haan died in Holland four years after leaving Paris.<sup>8</sup>

### *Portrait of Meijer de Haan with a lamp*

Shortly after Gauguin and De Haan arrived at Le Pouldu, they embarked on a decorative scheme for the dining room, in the spirit of the total work of art

championed by Richard Wagner, whose words were inscribed on the wall.<sup>9</sup> In a reconstruction of the inn's decor (ill. 2), Robert Welsh felt that the ensemble encompassed Gauguin's preoccupation with 'himself and De Haan as outcasts or wanderers at the fringe of an uncomprehending society'.<sup>10</sup> Gauguin introduced the notion of the artist as victim and renegade in his 1888 *Self-portrait (Les misérables)* (see p. 15, ill. 4), painted for Vincent van Gogh, whom he was soon to join in Arles. The title alludes to Jean Valjean, the hero of Victor Hugo's novel, which Gauguin had read that summer, perhaps at the instigation of Vincent, who encouraged his friends to read it.<sup>11</sup> The tendency to align himself and his cohorts with misfits who endured society's condemnation would remain a consistent topic in his repertory.

Although Welsh did not detect a coherent program, he recognized the prevalence of the double-entendre in the works and their installation. One can, however, discern an overall schema that revolves around the cycle of life and death, bolstered by references to temptation and fecundity. The common thread is the analogy between procreation and artistic creation. The ensemble abounds with sexual innuendos and allusions to the creative impulse, leavened by Gauguin's flair for caricature. Perhaps the bawdiest pun is on the ceiling, where heraldic geese are accompanied by the phrase 'oni soie ki mâle y panse', playing on the motto of the British Order of the Garter. The phrase could be construed as roughly equivalent to the 'goose who services the male'.<sup>12</sup>

Gauguin painted their portraits as pendants on doors that flanked the chimney. In *Self-portrait with halo* (1889, National Gallery of Art, Washington; W 323), he portrayed himself against a flat, intense red and yellow background, as a Christ-like magus, initiated into the secrets of the occult, as popularized that year by Edouard Schuré in his book *Les grands initiés*.<sup>13</sup> Suspended between halo and serpent, the artist casts a knowing sideward glance, a smirk on his lips. The apples dangling by his face materialize the cabalistic doctrines at his disposal. The stylized lilies, perverting the attribute of purity, segue into the curving snake, the satanic tempter, to exude a sinuous decadence. In a humorous dichotomy, he insists upon the twin sides of his personality, saint and sinner, the dialectic of savage and civilized, 'the Indian and the sensitive', that he had announced to his wife earlier.<sup>14</sup>

On the other side of the mantle, the *Portrait of Meijer de Haan with a lamp* (ill. 1) represents his counterpart, the novice possessing post-lapsarian knowledge, denoted by the picked apples on a platter for his contemplation. The genesis of the composition may be found in an ink drawing (ill. 3) of that autumn in which De Haan slouches over a book, absorbed in his reading, his jutting shoulder masking his hunched back.<sup>15</sup> The scene belies Marie *poupée's* assertion that in the evening the artists did not read anything – neither newspapers nor novels.<sup>16</sup> He holds his chin in his hand, his finger disappearing under his moustache, as





he bends his head, with thick curls escaping from under his cap.<sup>17</sup> The naturalism of this scene disappears in the oil as the Dutchman is transformed into the pendant of his mentor.

The representation of De Haan, coiffed with the yarmulke of his Jewish faith, takes on more of the simplification and exaggeration of a caricature, in the vein of the *Self-portrait with halo*. If Gauguin emphasized his sitter's ethnicity, it was motivated for more positive and profound reasons than might be immediately apparent to modern eyes.<sup>18</sup> His bulging eyes stare out in a trance toward the lamp, the globe of which duplicates his bulbous forehead – the centre of enlightenment. The portrait reflects the pseudo-science of phrenology, widely accepted in the nineteenth century, which considers character and intellect to be visible in the shape of the skull. A pronounced forehead distinguishes the person of genius.<sup>19</sup> If the drooping nose hints at a phallic configuration, in conjunction with the forehead it taps into the analogy between masculinity and creativity that runs throughout the dining room.

Also on the shelf in front of him are two books, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1668) and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor resartus* (1834). Together, they introduce the premise of the artist as rebel and visionary, concepts that he applied to De Haan as well as to himself. Barely visible in the back, a portal situates the sitter in an inner sanctum. The panels unite the artists visually and metaphorically as seers who navigate between the world of appearances and the world of signs.

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2. Reconstruction (1989) of the dining room of the inn of Marie Henry at Le Pouldu, 1889-90. Association des Amis de la Maison Marie Henry, Le Pouldu

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3. Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of Meijer de Haan reading*, 1889, ink on paper, 29.2 × 19.4 cm. Courtesy of The Kelton Foundation, Santa Monica



Much has been made of De Haan's diabolical demeanor, his foxy face framed by horn-like tufts of red hair in a composition where fiery hues predominate. The accentuation of the grotesque has been frequently ascribed to Gauguin's jealousy after his attempts to seduce Marie *poupée* were thwarted by her liaison with the debilitated De Haan. One scholar detailed 'the growing animosity of Gauguin toward De Haan, his desire for revenge that pushed him to massacre the traits of his rival and to instil him with the most demonic instincts'.<sup>20</sup> But the conflation of De Haan and the fox may be a deliberate measure to link the two artists in a trope of creative prowess and to underscore their personal relationship.

The fox held pride of place among Gauguin's motifs. Introduced in the 1889 relief *Be in love you, and will be happy* (see p. 42, ill. 7) the fox was 'the Indian symbol of perversity'.<sup>21</sup> The artist confounded his supposed 'Inca' ancestry with the American Indians of the Wild West, whom he admired in the performances of Buffalo Bill at the 1889 Exposition Universelle, going so far as to portray himself in a sketch wearing a feathered war bonnet while living in Le Pouldu.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that he identified with the fox from the outset. And, as the *Loss of innocence* (1891, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Va.; W 412) attests, soon thereafter the fox signifies the sexual tempter, pawing the deflowered maiden, appropriately modelled by Gauguin's pregnant mistress, Juliette Huet.<sup>23</sup> Standing in for Gauguin, the fox commingles the creative powers of the artist with procreative prowess. Similar allusions are at stake in Le Pouldu, and Gauguin's wry signature on both

portraits, 'PGO '89', a pun on slang for the male sex, strengthens this interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Given that the fox became Gauguin's alter ego, De Haan's resemblance to the animal binds the disciple to the master in ways that weave into the manifold motifs of the decor.

Moreover, no evidence supports the contention that Gauguin was disgruntled with his friend on any score. De Haan was Marie's lover before bringing his friend to the hotel, where the latter promptly turned his attentions to the maid.<sup>25</sup> Gauguin saved rancour for his art; women were interchangeable. As the artists' subsequent common lodgings confirm, their friendship endured until their paths diverged literally when De Haan went north and Gauguin south. Marie Henry and Gauguin, however, did have further contact, in an acrimonious court battle in 1894 over the art that Gauguin had left in her keeping. She won the case, claiming that the artist




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4. Jean-Jacques Feuchère,  
*Satan*, c. 1834, bronze  
(1850), ht: 37.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum,  
Amsterdam. Gift of  
Foundation Friends of the  
Van Gogh Museum,  
1996

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5. After Meijer de Haan,  
*Uriël Acosta* (location  
unknown); lithograph  
illustration from  
Jan Zürcher brochure,  
1888

had left it as collateral for his unpaid bill.<sup>26</sup> Despite her victory, she harboured a deep anger against him, which biased the literature about Gauguin well into the twentieth century.

For decades most scholarship perpetuated the view of Gauguin's portrait of De Haan as evil and Satanic.<sup>27</sup> But the simplistic equation of Satan to evil, alien to Gauguin's views on morality, contradicts the complexity of his thinking. Gauguin was heir to the 'metamorphoses of Satan' extolled by the romantics that continued in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rebellious artists of the July Monarchy identified with the heroic energy and magnificent independence of Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, punished for proposing an alternate world order.<sup>28</sup> This tendency saw the disruptive force of the devil, who cast doubt in men's minds, as a positive power. Baudelaire transformed this into an aesthetic axiom, declaring that 'the most perfect type of masculine Beauty is Satan – in the manner of Milton.'<sup>29</sup>

The romantic fascination with the fallen archangel may have supplied Gauguin with a source in the *Satan* (ill. 4) by Jean-Jacques Feuchère. Admired at the Salon of 1834, the statue extols Milton's Lucifer, and its popularity resulted in reductions and engravings that circulated throughout the century.<sup>30</sup> This disturbing Satan sits in a tortured pose, distorting Dürer's melancholy genius, which bears a strong resemblance to the multiple versions of De Haan's likeness. The most obvious similarity is the gesture, under the chin in a contrived pose, with the little finger at the lips while the others rest apart against the cheek. In the painting, the crease in the hand takes on a shape reminiscent of a cloven hoof, which finds an odd





6. Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of Acosta, De Haan and Mimi*, 1889, black crayon, brush and black wash on paper, 16.2 × 19.1 cm. Private collection

parallel in the exaggerated forehead. The devil's hair twists into a horn, and his eyes are set in diamond-shaped sockets above a strong V-line of eyebrows that meet in the vertical furrows. The rebellious Lucifer, whose craving for autonomy feeds his angst, suits Gauguin's notion of the artist, in keeping with his penchant for prototypes that reinforce the subject's character.

While scholars agree that the *Self-portrait with halo* represents Gauguin as a seer and prophet – a fallen angel à la Baudelaire, no one has argued that Milton's Lucifer affords a plausible explanation for De Haan's demonic mien.<sup>31</sup> His meditative pose has characterized creative minds since Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia*.<sup>32</sup> Not only does this reading correspond to the topos of the artist as a brooding visionary, it coincides with the view of De Haan as an outcast, whose fate follows Lucifer's trajectory. When De Haan exhibited in 1888 his most ambitious painting, *Uriël Acosta* (ill. 5), it was harshly criticized by I. N. Stemming [pseudonym of Jan Veth], in *De Nieuwe Gids*, the organ of the Dutch avant-garde, whose approbation the painter sought. Stemming dismissed *Uriël Acosta* as 'nothing more than a confused mixture of reminiscences of Rembrandt and Munkaczy', accusing De Haan of lacking a true artistic temperament.<sup>33</sup> The artist found himself in a predicament not unlike that of his protagonist, Acosta, a free-thinking seventeenth-century Dutch Jew excommunicated by rabbinical courts for heresy.<sup>34</sup> Despite a spirited promotional brochure written by Jan Zürcher, or perhaps even because of it, the painting's hostile reception prompted the artist to leave soon thereafter for Paris.<sup>35</sup> In a subsequent drawing Gauguin seems to have reprised the profile of Acosta (ill. 6), after the illustration in Zürcher's pamphlet, adjacent to a sketch of De Haan, conflating the artist and the philosopher.<sup>36</sup> Since Gauguin saw himself as a martyr to his art, De Haan's circumstances authenticated the artist as misunderstood, a rebel in exile. The Le Pouldu portraits trade on the polarity of the historical

understanding of Lucifer and Christ, both martyrs in the binary system of transgression and redemption.

If Lucifer personified the artist condemned for creative presumptions, his paradoxical counterpart was the artist as God's prophet, central to *Sartor resartus* by Carlyle. The author frames his philosophical enquiry in terms of the symbolism of clothing, which covers and uncovers divine truths. His meditations on spiritual revelation were influenced by the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, a religious mystic whose reputation flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Gauguin's sympathy with Swedenborg's theories amplified the appeal of *Sartor resartus*.

Although Gauguin was not erudite, nor did he have the education of Paul Sérusier or De Haan, or even of Vincent, he was considered well read by his peers, who mentioned the Bible, Shakespeare and Balzac.<sup>38</sup> He had read Baudelaire's translations of Poe in addition to *Les fleurs du mal*.<sup>39</sup> Gauguin's grasp of the theological fine points was limited – he probably never read Swedenborg's treatises; not that he was alone – most of his generation knew Swedenborg's theories filtered through Balzac and reconfigured by Baudelaire. Already in the 1880s, Gauguin's letters to Emile Schuffenecker verify his awareness of ideas extrapolated from Swedenborg via Balzac.<sup>40</sup> He expanded on the notion that God's signs could only be deciphered by the few, the true artists – a key concept for Gauguin, who claimed in his 'Notes synthétiques' that one must be 'a born artist, and few are chosen among all those who are called'.<sup>41</sup>

While Gauguin initially encountered Carlyle's writings through Vincent at Arles, his appreciation would have been heightened by De Haan, whose champion over the *Uriël Acosta*, Zürcher, had translated *Sartor resartus* into Dutch in 1880.<sup>42</sup> Carlyle ironically named his protagonist Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, invoking the Greek philosopher who scoured Athens with a lantern in search of an honest man, attached to a surname that translates as 'Devil's dung'. In Gauguin's painting, De Haan looks for answers, his unblinking eyes aided by his modern lantern that sheds light on the proverbial forbidden fruit.<sup>43</sup> Carlyle compares Teufelsdröckh to the Wandering Jew,<sup>44</sup> at once condemned for refusing revelation (the divinity of Christ) and an astute judge of human foibles. De Haan, as an exiled artist seeking a higher truth, doubles as the living embodiment of the legend. On another door, perpendicular to the chimney wall, Gauguin depicted himself as the Wandering Jew. *Bonjour Monsieur Gauguin* (1889, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, UCLA, Los Angeles; W 321) quotes the famous *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* (1854, Musée Fabre, Montpellier), where Gustave Courbet portrayed himself as the Wandering Jew.<sup>45</sup> Novelist Eugène Sue gave the legend new life with *Le Juif errant* (1844), which surely found added favour in Gauguin's eyes for its anti-clerical bias. By mid-century the character served as a surrogate for artists, the outsider who saw and understood.<sup>46</sup> Vincent had described Gauguin as 'the man from afar and



7. Cesare Ripa, *Melancholy*;  
in *Iconologia or Moral*  
*Emblems*, London 1709

who will go far', understood as an allusion to the Wandering Jew.<sup>47</sup> This fits an interpretation of the inn's decor that places the artists 'as outcasts or wanderers'.<sup>48</sup>

Over the years, *Paradise Lost* and *Sartor resartus* served as touchstones for Gauguin, uniting ideas to which he would repeatedly return. Both artists conceived of their struggle for artistic independence as a 'mission of divine right, to which one must commit one's self body and soul'.<sup>49</sup> Thus when Gauguin paired these volumes, he cast De Haan (and himself) as a martyr in the vein of Baudelaire's Lucifer, struggling against the constraints of rigid authority, and a prophet, deciphering universal truths.

#### *Portrait bust of Meijer de Haan*

A related likeness that year of Meijer de Haan, the polychrome wooden bust (ill. 8) that occupied the place of honour on the mantle between the panel portraits, oscillates between profundity and satire.<sup>50</sup> Repeating the pose seen in the painting, De Haan squints with the interiority of a meditating sage. However, the sharply arched eyebrows, the pointed ears of a satyr, the coquettish curls on the forehead of the coarsely handled image, not to mention the bird on top of his head, verge on the absurd.<sup>51</sup> The pose with the hand on the chin has been applied to philosophers, poets and artists since Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia*,<sup>52</sup> and given that a bird on the head is a stock attribute of Melancholy, as defined by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* (ill. 7), Gauguin surely intended to connect De Haan to the convention



8. Paul Gauguin, *Portrait bust of Meijer de Haan*, 1889, polychrome oak, ht: 57 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; G 86



of the melancholy genius.<sup>53</sup> The reference to a classic source for emblems is perhaps surprising in light of Gauguin's avowed repudiation of tradition, but it demonstrates the impressive dimensions of his eclecticism.

At the same time, the bird peeking over the cap on his head refutes the sober impression. Gauguin delighted in compounding his symbols to create multivalent meanings that cluster with diverse associations. The motif suits the libidinous undercurrents and Gauguin's love of irony. While traditionally identified as a cock, 'haan' in Dutch, the small comb is closer to that of a female. In this case, if it is understood to be a hen or 'poule', which is French slang for mistress, it is a jocular reference to Haan's muse, Marie *poupée*.<sup>54</sup>

Gauguin's circle avowed their antagonism to the illusionistic practices of the academic tradition in word and image. Over a year before he made this bust, he advised Schuffenecker from Pont-Aven: '[...] don't copy nature too much – art is an abstraction; draw on nature while dreaming before it and think more about the creation than the result it's the only way to rise toward God in creating like our divine master.'<sup>55</sup> The half-closed eyes bespeak the prophet who relies on his inner

eye, creating art from memory and imagination rather than the observation of nature.<sup>56</sup> In that vein, the angular green trellis clamped to De Haan's ear appears to be a stylized branch. A constant premise in Gauguin's creative process, repeated in the *Cahier pour Aline*, is that art renders 'nature through the veil of the soul'. He admonished artists to regard nature with 'eyes half-closed'.<sup>57</sup> The dynamic between the painted portrait, to the left of the chimney, and the bust turns on the ambiguity of sight – eyes wide-open peering into the invisible, as opposed to studying nature through lowered lids.

Meijer de Haan emerges from of the wooden block, left visible to materialize the transformation of the raw material through the artist's intervention.<sup>58</sup> Gauguin had to cut the block in back to fit the chimney.<sup>59</sup> The rough-hewn surface, in defiance of the suave handling insisted on by the academy, confirms Gauguin's quest for a primitivist technique well in advance of his departure for Oceania. Anticipating his 'ultra-savage sculptures' carved during his first trip to Tahiti, the abrupt cut of the base here invests this sculpture with a life force. If its phallic contours allude to De Haan's amorous affair with Marie *poupée*, its crudely crafted shape ties virility to creativity.



9. New Zealand, *Grand tomb of a Maori chief*, nineteenth century, wood; historic photograph of the Musée de l'homme (now Quai Branly), Paris

Since antiquity, phallic images have doubled as a metaphor for fertility and artistic creation.<sup>60</sup> It accords with the metanarrative of the decor at Le Pouldu based on the cycle of life. This theme, dear to Gauguin, found validation in the mystical writings of Eliphas Lévi, who interpreted the illusion of sexual love to give impetus to life.<sup>61</sup> Gauguin was predisposed to the writings of Lévi, who was a friend of his feminist grandmother, Flora Tristan. His growing interest in Eastern schools of thought encouraged him to use shapes influenced by the Hindu lingam, introduced here and used unequivocally in his 'ultra-savage sculptures'. The erotic undercurrents of De Haan's bust are emphasized by its location between two statuettes of exotic women, the kneeling nude *Woman of Martinique* (Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation; G 61) and the fragment of a frieze that Gauguin found near the Javanese Pavilion at the 1889 Exposition Universelle.<sup>62</sup>

### *Nirvana*

The following year, 1890, the diminutive *Nirvana* (see p. 36, ill. 5) transformed De Haan into a prophet or magus embodying the esoteric wisdom of the Orient.<sup>63</sup> While the portrait retains something of the earlier painting, with the suggestion of a horn on his right, the distortion of the visage pushes the limits of the recognizable. The exotic paraphernalia distances the Dutch artist from the Breton shores represented behind him with the menhir seen in *Aux roches noires*, his print advertising the 1889 Volpini exhibition. He is flanked by two female nudes, familiar from paintings of the Brittany period.<sup>64</sup> To the left, another faces the water. At right is written 'nirvana', which Gauguin defined as the 'last existing state in the infinite'.<sup>65</sup>

The mask-like face bears a striking likeness to a type of Maori relief, where the stylized face has mother-of-pearl eyes. Gauguin would have been struck by such examples as the chief's tomb (ill. 9) that he must have seen at the ethnographic museum in the Trocadéro.<sup>66</sup> The gold metallic paint and the bright blue against the pearlescent ground emulate the preciousness of Persian miniatures, which Gauguin revered.<sup>67</sup> In June of 1890, Gauguin had written to Bernard, 'All of the Far East, the great philosophy written in letters of gold in all their art'.<sup>68</sup> From the outset, his eclecticism binds word and image to style.

Gauguin's evolving thoughts about the artist's messianic calling blended easily with the Eastern metaphysical ideas about transcendence of earthly bonds embraced by the symbolists.

Within the circle at Le Pouldu, De Haan was respected because he knew 'the words of the Hebrew Bible, and even sings the words of the Nabis (prophets) to primitive rhythms'.<sup>69</sup> Among this group, De Haan's Jewish origins provided a link to the Talmud, however vague, which was a source of the mystical Kabbalah.



10. Paul Gauguin, *Memory of Meijer de Haan*, 1897, woodcut, 10.6 × 8.1 cm. Art Institute of Chicago

The Kabbalah was primary among the gnostic traditions that fuelled the popular understanding of the occult at the end of the century, such as Helena Blavatsky's *The secret doctrine*.<sup>70</sup> His esoteric costume has an Oriental flavour about it.<sup>71</sup> The high cap recalls a variation of the yarmulke, a sign of the Hebrew religion. Coiled around his arm is a long leather strap, like those used by Jews to attach a tefillin, a small box with verses from the Bible, worn during morning prayers. In orthodox practice, the strap winds around fingers to form the letter 'shin', which is a symbol of God.<sup>72</sup> Gauguin wittily inscribed himself into this equation by using the end of the serpentine thong as the 'G' of his signature on De Haan's hand, substituting himself for the Divine Creator. The strap's similarity to the schematic snake of the 1889 self-portrait further unites the two men as adepts of occult knowledge.

The phallic menhir, itself a symbol of fertility, divides the background where the two women, who seem almost to emerge from his head, evoke the cyclical flow of life and death. Perhaps they are sexualized figments of De Haan's mind.<sup>73</sup> In any case, the implications of the figures bring the painting back to the biblical Temptation that precipitates the cycle of birth, death and regeneration. Gauguin situates the artist savant at the nexus of the Western cycle of life, the existential reality of the human condition, and the Eastern doctrine of reincarnation, the prelude to nirvana.

11. Paul Gauguin, *Contes barbares*, 1902,  
oil on canvas, 130 × 89 cm.  
Folkwang Museum, Essen;  
W 625



### *Memory of Meijer de Haan*

In 1897 when Gauguin finished reading the complete translation of *Sartor resartus* in the *Mercure de France*,<sup>74</sup> he revisited De Haan's portrait in the form of a print (ill. 10). First-hand familiarity with Carlyle's text revived Gauguin's interest in the 1889 canvas, where the book lay prominently on the shelf. He had a watercolour replica (1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York) with him that almost certainly dates from the original portrait.<sup>75</sup> In the woodcut, the Dutchman (minus his cap) wears a garment like that of the two women behind him. The abundance of fabric distinguishes the missionary dress, tantamount to the church itself, against which Gauguin voiced vehement opposition soon thereafter in 'L'église catholique et les temps modernes' (1897-98).<sup>76</sup> On the back of the watercolour, Gauguin has recorded a passage from the writings of Flora Tristan, bitterly lamenting the plight of women who were deprived of their rights by existing laws. Many of Gauguin's attitudes about the rights of women echo those of his grandmother, and the use of the watercolour no doubt reiterated their force in his mind as he wrote his manuscript.<sup>77</sup>

Anticipating the spirit of *Contes barbares* (ill. 11), the woodcut bridges the transition from Carlyle's philosophy to Gauguin's own, evident in the 1897-98 essay,

which he reworked in 1902 as *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme* ('Catholicism and the modern mind'). The text galvanized Gauguin's appreciation of the spiritual depth, as well as the sensory breadth, of correspondences. If, as Carlyle concludes, 'the universe is one vast symbol of God',<sup>78</sup> Gauguin's painting envisions the calling of art as revelation.

### *Contes barbares*

The enigmatic De Haan dominates the *Contes barbares*, painted after Gauguin had settled in the Marquesas Islands on the edge of French Polynesia.<sup>79</sup> He signed the canvas in the lower right corner near the title, 'Paul Gauguin / 1902 / Marquises', only months before his death. A watercolour after *Meijer de Haan with a lamp* again provided the template for the oil. De Haan's features have hardened into the menacing mask of a totem with supernatural powers, radiating from his green eyes, a trait associated with evil.<sup>80</sup> He holds his chin in the twisted gesture, biting his fingers under his moustache. The hand retains the odd hoof-like shape that echoes his cleft brow. His nose is broader and more phallic, his ears are more pointed, and from under his rakish yarmulke the flame-like curl of hair is closer to a horn. His foot with blood-red talons protrudes from under the loose dress of the type, seen in the above print, favoured by Christian missionaries for native women in tropical climates. He becomes ever more the metamorphosis of Gauguin's emissary, the fox.

The full-length figure resembles the seated position of the Feuchère statue, strengthening the comparison. In addition to the gnawing gesture and ridges of hair, the bronze displays clawed toes that recur in the painting. The *Satan* was also a prototype for *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin.<sup>81</sup> The contorted pose of all three of these works exteriorizes a psychological malaise, one that originates in the desires that cause the individual's downfall.

De Haan crouches behind two figures, usually described erroneously as women. His neighbours are posed and lightly draped in a manner modified from figures on the sculpted reliefs on the temple at Borobudur that Gauguin frequently quoted. An androgynous Buddha figure sits in the middle next to a quasi-nude female, resembling an acolyte from one of the Javanese friezes.<sup>82</sup> The model is Tohotaua, the magnificent Marquesan beauty that Gauguin portrayed in *Woman with a fan* (1902, Folkwang Museum, Essen; W 609).<sup>83</sup> The trio evokes the three religions that constitute the core of Gauguin's syncretic beliefs, Judeo-Christian, Buddhist and Oceanic.<sup>84</sup>

The incongruous trinity sits amidst luxuriant foliage in a landscape heady with throngs of flowers and fruit fallen to rot on the earth. A cloud from out of the distance winds through the trees as if to envelope Tohotaua. Pink orchids hang across

the top, while the spectre of a face hovers behind her, above a phallic lily and stylized lotuses. The scene tells no story but exudes a palpable melancholy. The setting reeks of a tainted Eden.

When Gauguin returned to the subject of De Haan, his motives were many and complex. This essay focuses on the filiation of these portraits from 1889 to 1902 as a eulogy of friendship, concentrating here on what De Haan came to symbolize for Gauguin, rather than the polysemous implications of his image for *Contes barbares*.<sup>85</sup>

Speculations about De Haan's role in *Contes barbares* have led to a variety of alternative readings.<sup>86</sup> For instance, one interpretation is that De Haan, as Gauguin's proxy, symbolizes the latter's 'decreasing powers of attraction', while another proposes that Haan 'eavesdrops in tortured perplexity' as Tohotaua shares her knowledge that he can never grasp.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, another explanation is that the 'two young women recount folk stories to the point of hallucinating the presence of the devil'.<sup>88</sup>

A recapitulation of the successive portraits, however, suggests that De Haan enjoyed a more elevated status in Gauguin's eyes. Collectively they assert the Dutchman's iconic importance for the French artist. Since the 1889 portrait De Haan signified the maverick sage, an identity sustained by the duet between word and image initiated by the two books, *Paradise Lost* and *Sartor resartus*. Heroic nonconformist and mystical seer, De Haan encapsulates the paradigm of renegade and victim that Gauguin frequently applied to himself.

The biblical Temptation and the Fall that precipitated the loss of the Garden of Eden was one of Gauguin's obsessive themes, and he applied the notion of the life cycle to *Contes barbares* as a parable of the fate of the Polynesian culture. Like the syphilitic Gauguin in real life, the satanic representation of De Haan is paradoxically the prophet who rues the loss of paradise and the fallen angel who has fomented its ruin. The tempter who has thrust death into the world bites his fingers in compunction. His gesture recalls that of Gauguin, his thumb to his mouth in remorse for his deceitful behaviour, as seen in *Be in love....*<sup>89</sup> Gauguin reprises this motif in a late drawing of himself (Musée du Louvre) that parallels the gnawing gesture seen in the pictures of De Haan. No matter how far he withdrew from the land of his origins, he could never escape the burden of guilt imposed by his Christian upbringing, the oscillation between lust and shame.

The semi-nudity of Haan's companions juxtaposed to his own voluminous covering interjects an ambiance that reverberates in earlier portraits. The unmistakable perfume of the erotic and the exotic pervades *Contes barbares* as a result of his proximity to these lightly clad figures, like the sculptures flanking the bust in Marie Henry's dining room. Another twist of the erotic/exotic occurs in *Nirvana*, where the nude emblems of life and death spring from the mind of the occult visionary.<sup>90</sup> These twin threads of sex and reincarnation intertwine with the



artist/prophet as the icon of the creative spirit. The threesome in *Contes barbares* similarly continues an erotic/exotic circuit that revolves around the symbiotic nature of life and death, creation and destruction. Underlying these juxtapositions is the analogy between virility and genius that had been fundamental to the decor conceived by Gauguin and De Haan at Le Pouldu.

As Gauguin's alter ego, De Haan appropriates multiple guises that can accommodate the heroic outcast, the mystic seer, and even the *varua ino*, the herald of death seen in a number of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings.<sup>91</sup> A counterpart to the Baudelairean Lucifer, De Haan embodies Gauguin's ongoing construct of the artist who must destroy the existing order to create a new world. The regenerative promise of the lotus and the lily, seen on the right, introduces the notion of perpetual rebirth as a consequence of sacrifice.<sup>92</sup> De Haan presides over the cycle of life as a metaphor intimately bound to the creative process.

The cross-dressing De Haan pits clothed against unclothed, male against female, the artifice of the civilized versus the innocence of the primitive. His feminine garb, flagrantly transgressive, betrays the insidious nature of what it purports to conceal. Gauguin deployed the sardonic symbolism of clothing to expose the hypocrisy of the Christian tradition against the purity of the Buddhist and Maori cultures. As he deplored in his contemporary autobiography, *Avant et après*, these shapeless frocks epitomized the ruthless destruction of native customs by Christian authorities.<sup>93</sup> The sartorial charade owes its philosophical rationale to *Sartor resartus*, where clothing functions symbolically to conceal and to reveal the Divine. In keeping with Carlyle's thinking, such correspondences also emblemize the artist as one who sees past finite appearances into the mysteries of the universe. Thus, besides being a clairvoyant of the human condition, the true artist serves as the intermediary to the divine, offering a glimpse of the infinite.

The series of portraits of De Haan occupies a unique place in Gauguin's art, manifesting the principles driving his aesthetic philosophy for more than a decade. The accumulated significance of these images speaks to the artist's calling in modern society. Taken together they not only convey his views on the creative process, they attest to his understanding of art as revelation. Gauguin identified more closely with De Haan than with any other of his peers. In *Contes barbares* the autobiographical intensity of De Haan's presence incontestably aligns Gauguin's imminent death with the dying Oceania. As he confronted his impending demise, he must have assumed, if he did not in fact know, that the frail De Haan was dead. The painting transforms a personal saga into a metaphysical meditation on the meaning of death and the beyond. If Gauguin promulgates death as the price of creative regeneration, then he and De Haan made the leap into the infinite as artists who consecrated themselves body and soul to their art.<sup>94</sup>

## NOTES

I must begin by thanking Nathalie and Christian Volle for their generous hospitality, without which this research would not have been possible. I am particularly grateful to Anne Hélène Hoog, curator at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, and Marsha Rozenblit, Meyerhoff Professor of Jewish History, the University of Maryland, for their assistance throughout this manuscript, as well as Frank A. Felsenstein for his suggestions. I also want to thank Nancy Pressly for her perceptive comments on the manuscript. This essay was completed before the opening of the exhibition *Meijer de Haan* (2009) organized by the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Jelka Kröger, the curator, was so kind as to corroborate points of my discussion where noted.

1. Charles Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven: Documents inédits*, Paris 1921, is the primary source for the basic facts concerning the two artist during their stay in Le Pouldu. In a letter to Chassé, Henri Mothéré transcribed the recollections of Marie Henry, his companion later in life. As De Haan's successor, Mothéré was predisposed to his partner's opinions, and she had her own agenda in the telling of the story of her relationship to the Dutch painter. While the information is invaluable, it merits serious reservations. For example, Chassé does not take into consideration how the bitter lawsuit in 1894 between Marie Henry and Gauguin affected her account of their common history. Moreover, the second version, *Gauguin et son temps*, Paris 1955, presumably had greater input from Marie Henry's two daughters. The discrepancies between these two texts need more systematic examination. I rely on the first in this essay. Władysława Jaworska, 'Jacob Meyer de Haan', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisk Jaarboek*, 1967, no. 18, pp. 197-226, p. 198, clarifies the arrival of De Haan in Paris. Her article documents the art that the Dutchman produced during his stay in France.
2. 'un être menu, rachitique, contrefait, souffreteux, presque un infirme.' Chassé,

*Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 33; trans. in exhib. cat. *Gauguin*, Paris (Grand Palais) & Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1988-89, p. 169.

3. Armand Séguin, 'Paul Gauguin', *L'Occident* 16 (March 1903), p. 159, states that De Haan had some difficulties in following Gauguin's arguments (perhaps due to language?).

In contrast, Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 44, claims that De Haan's 'opinions philosophiques dépassaient son niveau' ('philosophical opinions were above [Gauguin's] head'). The translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

4. 'mon élève et très bon garçon'. Maurice Malingue (ed.), *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, Paris 1946, letter 90, p. 170, to Emile Schuffenecker, autumn 1889, Le Pouldu.

5. 'marche merveilleusement bien ici. Il vous dit bien des choses.' Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 89, p. 169, to Emile Bernard, October 1889, Le Pouldu.

6. Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 135, p. 273, to Mette Gauguin, April 1893, Tahiti.

7. Annie Joly-Segalen (ed.), *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*, Paris 1950, letter 12, p. 68, 31 March 1893.

8. Bogmila Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit to Brittany, June 1889-November 1890', in Eric M. Zafran (ed.), exhib. cat. *Gauguin's Nirvana: Painters at Le Pouldu 1889-1890*, Hartford (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art) 2001, pp. 15-60, pp. 58-59.

9. Henri Dorra, 'Le "Texte Wagner" de Gauguin', *Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français*, 1986, pp. 281-88.

10. 'de marginaux ou de nomades, laissés-pour-compte d'une société qui ne les comprend pas'. Robert Welsh, 'Auberge de Marie Henry au Pouldu', *Revue de l'art* 86 (1989), pp. 35-43, p. 42; trans. as 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry at Pouldu', in Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana*, pp. 60-79, p. 71. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, pp. 46-50, established the first description of the dining room. Paul Sérusier and Charles Filiger, among other friends, joined Gauguin and De Haan intermittently. Françoise Cachin, in exhib. cat. *Gauguin*, Paris & Washington 1988-89, nos. 92 and 93, pp. 165-69, summarizes the history of the two portraits.

11. Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, exhib. cat. *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The studio*

of the south, Chicago (Art Institute) and Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2001-2, p. 150 and n. 243.

12. Welsh, 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry', p. 70, notes the prurient pun but rejects the idea that the decoration is a reflection on the Haan-Henry relationship. The motto 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' ('Shame on those who think ill') for the Order of the Garter, founded by Edward III, admonishes against judgments based on false appearances. I am grateful to Philippe Romain for clarifying the word play, which depends on old French. Victor Merlhès, 'LABOR. Painters at Play in Le Pouldu', in Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana*, pp. 81-102, p. 96, interprets the overdoor panel with a goose under 'Maison Marie Henry' as a form of sexual banter, which reinforces my argument for the ceiling.

13. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyrski, 'Paul Gauguin's "Self-portrait with halo and snake": The artist as initiate and magus', *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (spring 1987), pp. 22-28. Gauguin had recently completed *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (W 326), which insists upon his sacrifices for art. See also Maria Grazia Messina, 'Autoritratti come maschere, 1888-1890', in *Paul Gauguin: Un esotismo controverso*, Florence 2006, pp. 15-42.

14. 'l'Indien et la sensitive'. Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 61, p. 126, to Mette, February 1888.

15. Merlhès, 'LABOR', p. 99.

16. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 33, relates that De Haan had brought with him a Bible that weighed around 10 kilos. I am grateful to Jelka Kröger for pointing out that it was a protestant Bible left at the inn, which in all probability did not belong to De Haan.

17. For whatever reason, religious or otherwise, De Haan consistently wore a cap, as his self-portraits show. While this is often taken to be an indication of his Jewish faith, Jelka Kröger considers this unlikely given his decision to lead the life of a professional artist, thus outside his religious community. De Haan may simply have worn a cap against the cold, especially given his delicate health, but Gauguin chose to depict De Haan wearing a yarmulke to emphasize his Jewish origins.

18. De Haan did have red hair, a trait used to characterize Jews, and Gauguin modified the cap in the oil painting to resemble a yarmulke. Thanks to Anne Hélène Hoog, I was able to see documentation in the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, that provided ample

evidence of the appearance of such caps in the nineteenth century.

Gauguin clearly endowed the sitter with a satanic bias, but I argue that this stems from a philosophical position, the positive association with Lucifer, rather than an anti-Semitic stereotype. The two men remained close until Gauguin left France. While horns, cloven hooves and devilry were applied to Jews in the Middle Ages, I did not find any visual evidence of this for France in the later nineteenth century. The plethora of anti-Semitic images of the period, which overlaps with the Dreyfus Affair, were tied to capitalism, where caricatures have hooked noses; contemporary references to the devil were rarely used to denigrate Jews in France during this period. Nonetheless, while images associating devils and Jews were not common in the nineteenth century, people might still have recognized the connection. Gauguin emphasized De Haan's Jewishness to reinforce the trope of the Wandering Jew and to give him the cache of the occult (see nn. 46 and 72). Likewise his nose, bulbous rather than hooked, is exaggerated, but its phallic shape probably has more to do with the analogy of the artist's creative powers. I am indebted in this discussion to Marsha Rozenblit, whose knowledge informed my argument.

Although Judas and Jews were often represented with red hair in the Middle Ages – Engelbert Ikonischbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Rom-Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1990 [1970], vol. 2, s.v. Judas Ischariot, col. 444 – Gauguin exploited De Haan's real colour for reasons other than ethnic slurs. Some proof of that is evident in *Contes barbares*, which balances De Haan with Tohotaua's red hair, likewise true to her colouring. Not that Gauguin was a realist, and he used colour primarily for artistic ends. So De Haan's red hair could align him with Satan while functioning as a pivotal hue for the composition.

The equation between the revival of medieval art, which appealed to Gauguin, and the recrudescence of a virulent anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century has been examined by Laura Morowitz, 'Anti-Semitism, medievalism and the art of the fin-de-siècle', *Oxford Art Journal*, 20 (1997), pp. 35-49. She points out connections with the Nabis and the symbolists, adding that Gauguin did not share their prejudices; not to mention that he was thousands of miles away during the Dreyfus

Affair, when the most extreme stages of anti-Semitism were reached.

19. Laurent Baridon and Martial Guédron, *Corps et arts: Physionomies et physiologies dans les arts visuels*, Paris 1999, p. 152. Anthea Callen, *The spectacular body: Science, method and meaning in the work of Degas*, New Haven 1995, pp. 13-20, describes the development of the scientific theories in the nineteenth century, when Broca introduced the idea that the functions of the brain were divided, with the intellectual, linguistic and moral concentrated in the left brain (governing the right side). The exaggeration of De Haan's left side may reflect Gauguin's awareness of this widely known research.

20. 'l'animosité croissante de Gauguin envers De Haan, son désir de revanche qui le poussait à massacrer les traits de son rival et à lui prêter les instincts des plus démoniaques.' Jaworska, 'Jacob Meyer de Haan', pp. 207-9, debates the most venomous accounts, one based on an interview with the daughter, and on p. 212, specifically in connection with *Nirvana*, she makes this assertion. Naomi Margolis Maurer, *The pursuit of spiritual wisdom: The thought and art of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin*, Madison 1998, p. 135, rightly disagrees. Maurice Malingue, *La vie prodigieuse de Gauguin*, Paris 1987, pp. 150-54, recounts the various versions, explaining why the one accusing Gauguin of pressing his attentions on Marie Henry and destroying her relationship with De Haan 'ne correspond pas à la réalité' ('does not accord with the truth'). Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit', p. 29, discusses the source of the calumny, noting that the 1894 court case between the innkeeper and the artist exacerbated the bad feeling, arguing that De Haan's daughter had a jaundiced perspective.

21. 'le renard symbole indien de la perversité'. Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 87, p. 167, to Bernard, September 1889, Pont-Aven, describing the relief *Be in love, you will be happy*.

22. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, *Paul Gauguin in the context of symbolism* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1975), New York 1978, p. 187, argues that the fox stems from North American Indians, not Hindu myths. He connects it with the evil opponent of Chingachgook in James Fenimore Cooper's *The deerslayer* and *The last of the Mohicans*. Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit', p. 32, fig. 42, illustrates the portrait sketch,

from a private collection. Gauguin's descriptions of himself as an Indian are well documented (see n. 14).

23. See Claire Frèches-Thory, in *Gauguin*, Paris & Washington, no. 113.

24. Wayne Andersen, *Gauguin's paradise lost*, New York 1974, p. 186. A play on his initials: PGO when spoken sounds like 'pego', English sailor's slang for the male sex.

25. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, pp. 37-38.

26. Henri Perruchot, *Gauguin*, trans.

Humphrey Hare, Cleveland 1963, pp. 260-62.

27. Maurer, *The pursuit of spiritual wisdom*, p. 136. She lists a number of scholars who characterize the portrait in this way in the context of her refutation of their arguments.

28. Mario Praz, 'The metamorphosis of Satan' (chapter 2), *Romantic agony*, London 1962 [1933], pp. 53-94. Suzanne Glover Lindsay, 'A modern Mephistopheles by Emile Hébert', *Cantor Arts Center Journal* 4, spring 2004-5, pp. 14-25, examines the evolution of the theme of Satan in nineteenth-century sculpture.

29. 'le plus parfait type de Beauté virile est Satan,—à la manière de Milton.' Baudelaire's *Journaux intimes*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 633, cited by Denys Sutton, 'The Paul Gauguin Exhibition', *Burlington Magazine* 91, no. 559 (October 1949), pp. 283-86, p. 284.

30. Feuchère exhibited the plaster *Satan* in the Salon of 1834 and a bronze in 1835. The first of many prints appeared in Alex D..., *Revue du Salon 1834: Musée*, Paris [1834]. The bronze was reissued in 1850 by the foundry Vittoz.

It was immensely popular. Andersen, *Gauguin's paradise lost*, p. 107, compares De Haan's pose to *Ugolino* by J.-B. Carpeaux and *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin. Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit', p. 27, links it to De Haan's painting *The Talmudic dispute*.

31. Sutton, 'The Paul Gauguin Exhibition', p. 284. Jirat-Wasiutyński, 'Self-portrait with halo and snake', p. 25, describes De Haan as a 'demonic seer' in the painting paired with Gauguin's self-portrait, which he relates to Milton's fallen angel. Jaworska, 'Jacob Meyer de Haan', p. 210, discusses 'le philosophe-démon conçu par Gauguin' ('the demon-philosopher conceived by Gauguin') Cachin in *Gauguin*, Paris & Washington, p. 178, describes Meijer de Haan as 'assez satanic, l'ange déchu, perdu par sa volonté de savoir, mais aussi, plus

biographiquement, le traditionnel rabbin, le savant Juif, l'homme qui connaît "le livre" et qui le transmet.' ('quite satanic, the fallen angel, condemned by his desire for knowledge, but also, more biographically, the traditional rabbi, the wise Jew, the man with knowledge of "the book", which he passes on.')

32. Maxime Préaud, 'Le diable mélancolique', *Mélancolies*, Paris 1982, pp. 52-78.

33. 'Zijne schilderij Uriël Acosta is niets dan een verwarde mengeling van herinneringen aan Rembrandt en Munkacz'. I. N. Stemming [pseudonym of Jan Veth], 'Meijer de Haan's Uriël da Costa', *De Nieuwe Gids* 3 (1888), pp. 436-37. I am grateful to Teio Meedendorp, researcher for Van Gogh's studio practice, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, for the rationale behind this rejection. He provided me with a copy of the review and the translations.

34. Jelka Kröger confirmed that none of her research for the exhibition indicates that any criticism was levelled at the Jewish subject. In contrast, Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Vincent van Gogh and the birth of cloisonism*, Toronto 1981, p. 347, stated that it 'provoked resentment in conservative Jewish circles in Amsterdam [...] for depicting sympathetically a free-thinking seventeenth-century Dutch Jew of Portuguese origin who had been repeatedly excommunicated by rabbinical courts for heresy and died, a martyr to his beliefs.' As I have tried to suggest, while the disapproval was on artistic grounds, rather than religious, one can still draw a parallel between Acosta's martyrdom and De Haan's self-imposed exile.

35. Teio Meedendorp also clarified the role of Jan Zürcher's brochure *Meijer de Haan's Uriël Acosta*, Amsterdam 1888. See also Teio Meedendorp, 'Dr Jan Zürcher, 1851-1905. Een ontwikkelde zonderling, zonderling ontwikkeld', *Kunstlicht* 15 (1994) 3/4, pp. 10-15.

36. Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit', p. 29, identifies the front figure as De Haan, whereas I see him as the sketchy profile in the middle, with Marie Henry's baby, known as Mimi, to the left.

37. Filiz Eda Burhan, *Vision and visionaries: Nineteenth century psychological theory. The occult sciences and the formation of the symbolist aesthetic in France* (Ph.D. Diss. Princeton University, 1979, pp. 128-141), discusses the influence of Swedenborg and Balzac on Gauguin.

H. R. Rookmaaker, *Synthetic art theories: Genesis*

*and nature of the ideas on art of Gauguin and his circle*, Amsterdam 1959, pp. 28-29, lays out Balzac's importance for Baudelaire, who translated these ideas into meaningful theories for artists. For the larger reception of Carlyle, see Alan Carey Taylor, 'Pénétration massive de l'œuvre de Carlyle en France', in *Carlyle et la pensée latine*, Paris 1937, pp. 325-53.

38. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 54.

39. Paul Gauguin, 'Diverses Choses', pp. 213-15. 'Diverses Choses', 1896-97, is a loose essay of his thoughts that follows 'Noa Noa' in the manuscript preserved in the Louvre.

40. Burhan, *Vision and visionaries*, p. 141 and n. 152, points out that Gauguin paraphrased the mystical numerology from *Louis Lambert* in a letter to Schuffenecker (Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 11, pp. 44-46, 14 January 1885, Copenhagen). According to her, p. 133, Gauguin's letter also alludes to correspondences and chromatics in ways that align directly with ideas presented in Baudelaire's *Salon de 1846*.

41. 'il faut être, en un mot, né un artiste et peu sont élus parmi tous les appelés'. Daniel Guérin (ed.), *Oviri. Ecrits d'un sauvage*, Paris 1974 (*The writings of a savage: Paul Gauguin*, trans. Eleanor Leveux, New York 1974), p. 22, 'Notes synthétiques'.

42. I am again indebted to Teio Meedendorp, who confirmed that J.W.C.A. [Johannes Wilhelm Cornelis Anton] and Jan Zürcher are one and the same (see n. 33). Zürcher made a translation of Carlyle into Dutch when he was in his late teens, but this was only published in 1880 when he was twenty-nine. In fact, he was not much older than De Haan and Van Gogh. Vincent read the book in 1883, so he could have read it in Dutch or English.

43. Maurer, *The pursuit of spiritual wisdom*, p. 134, describes the subjects of both books as 'man's troubled search for knowledge'.

44. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor resartus*, Oxford 1987, p. 14. Welsh, 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry', n. 35, sees a plausible connection between De Haan and Teufelsdröckh, whose quest evokes the 'Wandering Jew'. Carlyle's protagonist is a composite of many of the contradictory traits that Gauguin saw in himself, fallen angel, torn between good and evil.

45. Gauguin saw Courbet's painting when he visited Montpellier the previous year with Vincent. Henri Dorra, 'Gauguin's dramatic Arles

- themes', *Art Journal* 38, no. 1 (fall 1978), pp. 12-17, p. 15, proposes that Gauguin encounters death in this painting. This is all the more meaningful in that Gauguin first painted this motif, reminiscent of the grim reaper, in *Human misery (Grape harvest at Arles)* (1888, Ordrupgaard Collection, Copenhagen; W 304), when he was with Vincent.
46. Eugène Sue, *Le juif errant*, Paris 1844. Anne Hélène Hoog, 'L'ami du peuple ou "Le Juif Errant" d'Eugène Sue', in exhib. cat. *Le juif errant, un témoin du temps*, Paris (Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme) 2001, pp. 109-25, p. 111.
47. 'Vincent m'appelle quelquefois l'homme qui vient de loin et qui ira loin.' Victor Merlhès (ed.), *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: Documents, témoignages*, vol. 1: 1873-1888, Paris 1984, letter 193, p. 306, to Schuffenecker, c. 20 December 1888, Arles.
48. Welsh, 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry', p. 71, quoted above, n. 10.
49. 'mission de droit divin, à laquelle il devait se consacrer corps et âme'. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 32.
50. June Hargrove, 'Gauguin's bust of Meyer de Haan: "la nature à travers le voile de l'âme"', in *Mélanges pour Anne Pinget*, Paris 2008, pp. 330-38.
51. June Hargrove, 'Against the Grain: The sculpture of Paul Gauguin in the context of his contemporaries', *Van Gogh Studies 1: Current issues in 19th-century art*, Zwolle & Amsterdam 2007, pp. 72-121, pp. 86-87.
52. Maxime Préaud, 'Le diable mélancolique', *Mélanges*, Paris 1982, pp. 52-78. I am grateful to him for suggestions on the iconography of melancholy.
53. Caesar Ripa, *Iconologia or Moral Emblems*, London 1709, fig. 59. One of the Four Temperaments, the figure symbolizing Melancholy (Malenconico) includes a sparrow on his head, a sign of solitariness because it does not converse with other birds.
54. Hargrove, 'Gauguin's bust of Meyer de Haan', p. 336.
55. '[...] ne copiez pas trop d'après nature – L'art est une abstraction; tire-la de la nature en rêvant devant et pensez plus à la création qu'au résultat c'est le seul moyen de monter vers Dieu en faisant comme notre divin maître créer.' Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 67, p. 134, to Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888, Pont-Aven; and Merlhès, *Correspondance*, letter 159, p. 210.
56. Mark Cheetham, 'Mystical memories: Gauguin's neoplatonism and "abstraction" in late-nineteenth-century French painting', *Art Journal* 47, no. 1 (spring 1987), pp. 15-21, p. 16, discusses the phenomenon of the closed eyes in Gauguin's self-portraits and the role of memory in the creative process, using some of the same passages from Gauguin's writings.
57. 'la nature à travers le voile de l'âme'. 'les yeux à demi-clos'. Paul Gauguin, 'A ma fille Aline, ce cahier est dédié': notes éparses, sans suite comme les Rêves, comme la vie toute fait de morceaux: *journal de jeune fille* [1893], 2 vols., ed. Victor Merlhès, Bordeaux 1989, vol. 2, manuscript facsimile n.p. (p. 2 of the facsimile). The manuscript, in the Doucet Library, is commonly called *Cahier pour Aline*.
58. Welsh, 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry', p. 67, claims that Gauguin cut the oak block in back so that the bust would fit on the chimney mantle. Koji Takahashi, 'The Superficial paradise: A study on Gauguin's sculpture and ceramics', in exhib. cat. *Paul Gauguin*, Tokyo (National Museum of Modern Art) 1987, pp. 37-42, p. 40, states the 'metamorphosis of materials [...] is [...] the myth of creation'.
59. Welsh, 'Gauguin and the inn of Marie Henry', p. 40. Laurence Madeline, *Ultra-sauvage, Gauguin sculpteur*, Paris 2002, pp. 82-84, places the bust in the larger context of his oeuvre as well as its placement at Le Pouldu.
60. For example, see Druick and Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin*, pp. 122-24, 182-83, on the importance of virility for creative powers in the thinking of these two artists.
61. Jirat-Wasiutyński, 'Self-portrait with halo and snake', pp. 26-27, proposed that the theme of the dining room is the life cycle. He quotes Eliphas Lévi [A. L. Constant], *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, 2 vols., Paris 1856, vol. 1, p. 124, as a source for Gauguin.
62. Chassé, *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, pp. 40 and 48. Gauguin's *Woman of Martinique* (1887, painted terracotta, on loan to the University Art Museum Princeton from the Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation). According to Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, 'Le kampong et la pagode: Gauguin à l'Exposition Universelle de 1889', in *Gauguin: Actes du colloque, Musée d'Orsay*, Paris 1991, pp. 101-42, p. 119, the plaster fragment was probably Cambodian and not Javanese.

63. Burhan, *Vision and visionaries*, p. 226, remarking that since J.-J. Rousseau, occultists believed that the Orient was the land of prophets.

64. Eric Zafran, 'Searching for Nirvana', in Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana*, pp. 103-27, p. 117, describes the different visual quotes. The female figures are a composite from *In the waves* (*Ondine*) (1889, Cleveland Museum of Art; W 336), and *Life and death* (1889, Khalil Museum, Cairo; W 335).

65. 'comme dernière étape existant dans l'infini'. Paul Gauguin, 'L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme', annotated by Philippe Verdier, *Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch* 46/47 (1985-86), pp. 299-328, p. 301. The manuscript is in the St Louis Art Museum.

66. Gauguin undoubtedly saw the *Grand tomb of a Maori chief*, New Zealand, on one of his many visits to the Musée ethnographique. According to Eric Zafran and Stephen Kornhauser, 'A technical study of "Nirvana"', in Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana*, pp. 117, 143-47, the composition was slightly reworked, making the face more mask-like, possibly when Gauguin returned to Paris in 1893. However, Gauguin had more chances to see a Maori panel in Paris than in Tahiti. I am grateful to Eric Zafran for a copy of the radiograph of *Nirvana* that shows the changes, including the overpainting of 'touts' adjacent to 'Nirvana'.

67. Fereshteh Daftari, *The influence of Persian art on Gauguin, Matisse, and Kandinsky*, New York 1991, pp. 71-80. Redon's *The golden cell* (1892, British Museum), painted in oil and gold metallic paint on paper, has a palette that is closely aligned with that of *Nirvana*, so one might wonder about the connection between the noticeably precious materials chosen by the two men at this time. Gauguin had little access to such materials in Brittany, and he was gone by the spring of 1891, before the dates generally ascribed to Redon's works.

68. 'Tout l'Orient, la grande pensée écrite en lettres d'or dans tout leur art'. Malingue, *Lettres*, letter 106, p. 193, to Bernard, June 1890, Le Pouldu.

69. 'Nabi hollandais qui sait les paroles des Nabis de la Bible hébraïque, et même chante les paroles des Nabis sur des rythmes primitifs, vit harmonieux quoique troublé quant à l'esprit.' ('Dutch Nabi who knows the words of the Hebrew Bible, and even sings the words of the

Nabis [prophets] to primitive rhythms, lives harmoniously though spiritually troubled.') From Sérusier's letter quoted in Agnès Humbert, *Les Nabis et leur époque*, Geneva 1954, p. 50.

70. Helena P. Blavatsky, *The secret doctrine*, 1888, was perhaps the most important of these popular mystical publications. Jirat-Wasiutyński, 'Self-portrait with halo and snake', p. 26, connects this painting with esoteric Talmudic doctrines.

71. Welsh-Ovcharov, 'Gauguin's third visit', p. 29, fig. 34a, shows a Dutch orthodox Jew of 1887 wearing a similar cap.

72. Marsha Rozenblit was especially helpful with this point. Tefillin are small boxes, in which are inserted various verses from the Bible about the one-ness of God and the need to observe the law. These boxes are then attached to leather straps. One box is set upon the head with a leather strap around the head and two straps coming down from the head. The other box is attached to a long leather strap that is wound around the left arm 7 times, then around several of the fingers to form the letter 'shin', which is a symbol of God. These boxes and straps are placed on the head and arm only during morning prayers during the week.

73. Charles Stuckey, 'Gauguin inside out', in Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana*, pp. 129-141, p. 130.

74. 'Sartor Resartus', *Mercur de France*, trans. Edmond Barthélemy, 1895-97. Alan Carey Taylor, *Carlyle et la pensée latine*, Paris [1937], p. 336, discusses Carlyle's exceptional popularity in France.

75. Zafran, 'Searching for Nirvana', p. 121 (n. 115), considers the MoMA watercolour to be a replica, rather than a preparatory study, which the artist had with him in the South Pacific.

76. See passages in 'L'église catholique et les temps modernes' ('The Catholic church and modern times'), which follows 'Diverses Choses', in the Louvre's version of the 'Noa Noa' manuscript, pp. 320-25. The Church was virtually inseparable in his mind from the French State in administering the colonies. This manuscript was reworked into *L'esprit moderne et le catholicisme* ('Catholicism and the modern mind') in 1902. See also Verdier's annotation to Gauguin, 'L'esprit moderne', n. 65. Elizabeth C. Childs, '"Catholicism and the modern mind": The painter as writer in late career', in exhib. cat. *Gauguin Tahiti*, Paris (Grand Palais) and Boston



(Museum of Fine Arts), 2003-4, pp. 223-41.

Gauguin continued his anti-clerical diatribe to the end of his life.

77. Patricia T. Mathews, *Passionate discontent: Creativity, gender, and French symbolist art*, Chicago 1999, pp. 161-63, analyzes Tristan's *Promenades dans Londres* in Gauguin's thinking, and she makes clear that the artist was no feminist in the real sense of the word. (She quotes the English version, pp. 72-73.)

78. Sutton, 'The Paul Gauguin Exhibition', p. 285.

79. For a synthesis of the scholarship to date on *Contes barbares*, see Richard Brettell in *Gauguin*, Paris & Washington, no. 280.

80. Praz, *Romantic agony*, p. 327.

81. See n. 30.

82. Henri Dorival, 'Sources of the art of Gauguin from Java, Egypt and Ancient Greece', *Burlington Magazine* 93, no. 577 (April 1951), pp. 118-22, discusses the photographs that Gauguin possessed of ancient sculpture in Java (Indonesia). Druick and Zegers, 'Le kampong et la pagode', pp. 132-33, discuss how Gauguin might have come to own these photographs, taken by Isidore van Kinsbergen.

83. Bengt Danielsson, *Gauguin in the South Seas*, New York 1966, p. 256, identifies Tohotaua. See also June Hargrove, 'Woman with a fan: Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati – a parable of immortality', *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 3 (September 2006), pp. 552-66.

84. Childs, 'L'esprit moderne', p. 285, recognizes the three religious traditions in the trio, although she designates De Haan as Jewish, rather than Judeo-Christian. In my view, De Haan signifies the whole Western tradition rather than himself in this context. She is one of the few to note the figure's androgyny.

85. For a more extensive discussion of *Contes barbares*, see June Hargrove, "'L'Œil qui écoute": Paul Gauguin's *Contes barbares*', *Revue de l'Art*, 2010 (forthcoming). For another view of Gauguin's esoteric mind set, see Maria Grazia Messina, 'Taiti distanza emoria', in *Paul Gauguin: Un esotismo controverso*, pp. 117-37.

86. Charles Morice, 'Les Gauguins du Petit Palais et de la rue Laffitte', *Mercure de France*, February 1904, p. 392. Karl Ernest Osthaus bought *Contes barbares* from Vollard soon thereafter.

87. Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Gauguin's religious themes*, New York 1985, p. 263; Maurer, *The*

*pursuit of spiritual wisdom*, p. 174.

88. Mathews, *Passionate discontent*, p. 170.

89. Amishai-Maisels, *Gauguin's religious themes*, pp. 128-30, quotes Gauguin's letter to Bernard, September 1889, in which he describes himself as a 'monster', and she elaborates on the meaning of his gesture of biting or sucking his thumb in the tobacco pot.

90. Stuckey, 'Gauguin inside out', pp. 133-34, links *Nirvana* to Rodin's *Gates of Hell* for the comparable use of nude figures to represent the inner thoughts of the protagonist. This concept works equally well here, especially given the similar poses, with its probably common source (see n. 73).

91. Notably in *Parau na te varua ino* (1892, National Gallery of Art, Washington; W 458) and *Parau Hanohano* (1892, Private collection; W 460).

92. Childs, 'L'esprit moderne', p. 285, approaches this interpretation when she writes that the flowers, especially the lotus, 'évoquent une idée de pureté dans la régénération perpétuelle de la nature' ('evoke an idea of purity in the perpetual regeneration of nature').

93. Paul Gauguin, *Avant et après*, p. 93. The quote is much longer.

94. See n. 49.



# Musée Rodin: Thorvaldsen as a role model

Sandra Kisters

The Musée Rodin in Paris is one of the best known personal or monographic museums in the world. It opened in 1919, shortly after the death of Auguste Rodin. However, it is not an isolated case, but belongs to a tradition that developed in the nineteenth century. At that time, it was highly unusual for an artist to be honoured with a personal museum. Important works by contemporary French sculptors were generally placed at the Musée du Luxembourg after their deaths. The museum as an institution was a relatively new phenomenon, and in Paris only the painter Gustave Moreau was commemorated by a combination of a personal museum and the preservation of several rooms, such as the bedroom in which he died.<sup>1</sup> However, the Musée Gustave Moreau did not open until the early twentieth century (1903) and had been a private initiative. The concept of personal museums dedicated to the oeuvre of one artist, and the opening of both birth houses and studio houses that artists had occupied during their lives, developed during the nineteenth century.

As a result of the romantic idea that art was the unique expression of an individual, people became fascinated by the lives of great artists.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the focus was mainly on great artists of the past, in particular Renaissance masters. Some of the first houses that opened to the public were the Dürerhaus in Nuremberg (1826), Casa Buonarroti in Florence (1858) and Casa di Raffaello in Urbino (1873).<sup>3</sup>

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1. Collection of antique sculpture in the Villa des Brillants, Meudon, between 1906 and 1917, anonymous silver gelatine print. Musée Rodin, Paris

Yet, gradually people became interested in famous contemporary artists, and this interest resulted in the publication of monographs and biographies or photographic series such as *Artists at home* (1884) by Joseph Parkin Mayall and *Nos contemporains chez eux* by Dornac (pseudonym for Paul Marsan), which appeared between 1889 and 1900 in *Le Monde illustré*.<sup>4</sup> It also led to a fascination on the part of the public for houses, studios and even graves of great artists. For instance, between 1858 and 1860 the *Art Journal* published a series called 'The tombs of English artists', which functioned as an adjunct to the series of 'Living artists'.<sup>5</sup> The Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, which opened in 1848, and the Museo Canoviano – consisting of a Gipsoteca (1836) and La Casa Canova – in Possagno were two of the first personal museums dedicated to contemporary artists.<sup>6</sup>

Personal museums or artists' houses that were opened to the public in the nineteenth century were usually dedicated to successful academic artists, such as the Musée Wiertz in Brussels (1866), the Museo Vela in Ligornetto, Switzerland (1898), and Leighton House in London (1900). Rodin, on the contrary, adopted the position of an anti-academic sculptor, an unrecognized genius who was being obstructed by the establishment, and his supporters emphasized the difficulties he had with the French State in trying to realize a monographic museum devoted to his work. In this essay I will argue that Rodin's personal museum was the culmination of the development that had taken place in the nineteenth century. In addition, I will show that the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen served as a model for the Musée Rodin in Paris.

#### The successful academic versus the untaught genius

During his lifetime, Auguste Rodin's marble sculptures were often compared to those by one of his famous predecessors, the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, with Rodin's work being considered far more progressive than Thorvaldsen's conservative neo-classicism. Thorvaldsen and the other most renowned sculptor of the early nineteenth century, the Italian Antonio Canova, both regarded Greek statues as ideal representations of nature. As the American sculptor Truman H. Bartlett wrote in a series of ten biographical articles about Rodin in *The American Architect and Building News* (1889), Rodin was opposed to the copying of antique examples, because he felt that it was most important for an artist to work directly from nature.<sup>7</sup> Once he became more successful, Rodin and his supporters emphasized that he was lucky to have had no academic schooling.<sup>8</sup> While cultivating the myth of the untaught genius, they ignored the fact that Rodin was trained at the so-called 'Petite Ecole', the Ecole Gratuite de Dessin (later the Ecole spéciale de dessin et de mathématiques) that instructed decorative sculptors in an eighteenth-century rococo style. In addition, Rodin studied old masters at the

Louvre, drew from life at the horse market and took drawing lessons at the Ecole de la Manufacture des Gobelins.<sup>9</sup> After he had been refused admission to the Académie des Beaux-Arts three times, Rodin started to glorify the medieval guild practise of apprentice, assistant and master and repeatedly expressed his criticism of the academic system.<sup>10</sup> Thorvaldsen, who received early recognition (he won several medals during his years of study at the Academy of Fine Arts at Copenhagen), and who had a successful academic career, earning a long list of honorary titles, represented the archetype of the academic artist, while Rodin and his admirers actively promoted the myth of the unrecognized genius.

Although Rodin and Thorvaldsen seem to embody two opposites, representing different values and artistic styles, the two sculptors have a lot more in common than one might expect. Rodin posed as an anti-academic sculptor, but he longed for recognition in France, either through the conventional Salon system or by winning important commissions.<sup>11</sup> Like Thorvaldsen, he accepted honours such as the Légion d'honneur, and he agreed to succeed James Abbott McNeill Whistler as president of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in 1903.



2. Joachim Ferdinand Richardt, *Thorvaldsen in his studio at the Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen*, 1840, oil on canvas, 44.5 × 57.5 cm. Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen

The two sculptors were equally admired by their contemporaries and were frequently written about in the press, and both received a large number of visitors to their studios once their reputations were established. Moreover, these studios functioned both for work and for promotion, places where potential buyers could look at the plaster models and choose the works that they would like to have executed in bronze or marble. Both were modellers, who delegated the carving of marbles to their *praticiens*,<sup>12</sup> and, like Thorvaldsen, Rodin later in life employed a small army of assistants in order to realize all the commissions he accepted.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the fame they achieved during their lifetime, both sculptors became favourite subjects for others artists. Numerous portraits of Thorvaldsen were made by his contemporaries, both sculptors and painters, some of which show him in his studio, although he is never shown at work. In *Thorvaldsen in his studio at the Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen* by Joachim Ferdinand Richardt (ill. 2), although Thorvaldsen is portrayed with the attributes of a sculptor and surrounded by sculptures, he is lost in thought – an archetypal representation of artists indicating the inspiration of genius.<sup>14</sup> The sculptures in the studio date from different periods, thus representing a promotional overview of his career. For example, the *Christ* was modelled in 1821, the monumental *Mars and Cupid* dates from 1810 and the relief of *Three Graces with Cupid* was made in 1831.<sup>15</sup>



Thorvaldsen was probably the first famous artist ever to be photographed.<sup>16</sup> A daguerreotype by Aymard-Charles-Theodore Neubourg is dated 1840, only one year after Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre had invented the medium. It shows the sculptor in a garden, standing next to an easel upon which a relief of Diana and Jupiter is displayed (ill. 3).<sup>17</sup> Like other contemporaries who posed for some of the earliest photographs, he makes a gesture with his left hand to ward off the evil eye.<sup>18</sup>

Rodin also was the subject of numerous portraits both by sculptors and painters, although this was easily surpassed by the fascination the elderly sculptor had on photographers, including Edward Steichen and Gertrude Käsebier (ill. 4). Photography played an important role in the construction of Rodin's public image, in particular after 1900. Like Thorvaldsen, Rodin collected antiquities and contemporary art, which partly served as inspirational sources for his work. However, while Thorvaldsen also became an important patron for young artists and helped to promote their careers, Rodin's role as a supporter of other sculptors was more limited. The two sculptors donated their sculptures and art collections to the city of Copenhagen and to the French State respectively, and they were honoured posthumously by personal museums, which opened shortly after their deaths.

3. Aymard-Charles-Theodore Neubourg, Thorvaldsen in a garden, c. 1840, daguerrotype. Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen

4. Gertrude Käsebier, Rodin in front of *The gates of Hell*, 1905, photograph. Musée Rodin, Paris





## Two museums to honour one sculptor

The Musée Rodin is situated in the eighteenth-century Hôtel Biron on the rue de Varenne in Paris and opened its doors on 4 August 1919. Although Rodin had lived there part of the time from 1908 until his death, it did not become a studio house museum. Instead, as the museum's first curator Léonce Bénédict wrote in the catalogue of 1919, it was to be devoted to the definitive oeuvre of the master, including not only his bronze and marble statues, but also drawings, paintings and a display of the history of the famous *Gates of Hell* (1880-89/90) in the old chapel next to the building.<sup>19</sup> The Musée Rodin presented to the general public the story of a hardworking modeller who became a *statuaire*, a maker of statues.

It was not until 29 May 1948 that a second museum opened, the Musée Rodin in Meudon. In 1895 Rodin had acquired the 'Villa des Brillants', a small country house with a beautiful garden. Whenever the opportunity arose, Rodin bought adjoining land or small buildings and eventually had the villa surrounded by a large number of studios for enlargers, *metteurs au points*, carvers etc.,<sup>20</sup> but since Rodin's death in 1917 most of the studios have been demolished. It was not until 1953 that the villa opened to the public. As Bénédict stated in an account of the



5. Rodin's plaster models in the museum at Meudon. Musée Rodin, Paris

museum on 26 March 1919, Meudon was to be a place of pilgrimage, where visitors could catch a glimpse of the private life of *le grand maître* and study his working process.<sup>21</sup> However, the main attraction of Meudon was, and still is, the reconstructed Pavillon de l'Alma. This was specially built to house Rodin's one-man exhibition in 1900, which he had organized to coincide with the Exposition Universelle. Here the public can study the development of several of Rodin's larger commissions, such as the monument to Victor Hugo (1889-1901), the *Gates of Hell* and the *Burghers of Calais* (1884-89). In this small rectangular museum in Meudon a series of plaster models for each of these projects is displayed on a long elevated wooden platform, which enables the public to compare different phases of the design (ill. 5). Bénédite called this concept a *musée étude*.<sup>22</sup>

### The first Musée Rodin

Rodin's *exposition particulière* in 1900 was the end result of a remarkable publicity campaign, which, interestingly enough, started with a controversy. In 1898 the sculptor had been severely criticized for his design for a posthumous statue of Honoré de Balzac. The life-size plaster sketch of the writer in his dressing gown was compared to a snowman or a big lump of meat by art critics such as Jean Villemer, who wrote down comments they had overheard from the public,<sup>23</sup> although Rodin had powerful supporters, who tried to raise money to have the statue realized after its refusal by the Société des Gens de Lettres. However, the artist declined this offer, as the argument had become a feud between pro- and anti-Dreyfusards, and he did not want to adopt a political position.<sup>24</sup>

Instead, Rodin focused on new projects, including a collaboration with Léon Maillard on his luxurious monograph *Auguste Rodin statuaire*, which appeared in print in 1899.<sup>25</sup> This publication reflects some of Rodin's principal concerns: his battle against the establishment, and his claim that, rather than being a revolutionary sculptor, he was the descendant of a great sculptural tradition that went back to Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – in particular Michelangelo. 1899 was also the year in which Rodin's first one-man show took place in Edmond Picard's La Maison de l'Art in Brussels, co-organized by one of the most influential of Rodin's advocates, Judith Cladel, writer and daughter of the French novelist Léon Cladel. Once the first positive reviews appeared in print, she promoted his success outside France by publishing the article 'L'Œuvre de Rodin a l'étranger' ('Rodin's work abroad') in *La Dépêche*, and she also played an important role in the travelling exhibition through the Netherlands that resulted from the show.<sup>26</sup>

However, the project that was most on Rodin's mind in 1899 was the solo exhibition he wanted to realize in Paris at the same time as the Exposition Universelle

of 1900. According to his biographer Ruth Butler, Rodin may have intended to retaliate after the *Balzac* row.<sup>27</sup> Friends such as the writer Octave Mirbeau and the art critic Gustave Geffroy helped him to get permission and raise money to build a special pavilion to exhibit his work close to the site of the Exposition.<sup>28</sup> The 'Pavillon de l'Alma' was designed by Alexandre Marcel and Louis Sortais, and on the original designs for the building it is referred to as 'Musée Rodin, Pavillon de l'Alma' and 'Musée des Œuvres de Monsieur Rodin'.<sup>29</sup> The simplicity of the building, flooded with daylight, distinguished it from the exhibition buildings, and visitors were overwhelmed by the whiteness of its interior. Not only did Rodin show a large number of plasters, the disputed *Balzac* among them, but the walls and pedestals were also white (ill. 6).<sup>30</sup> The only touch of colour came from the green of the trees outside, which were visible through the high arched windows. The sixty-year old sculptor received highly favourable reviews. People were impressed by Rodin's overall presentation of his work, and he was subsequently inundated with request for commissions, for the most part portrait busts for American, German and British clients. However, the interest of foreign museums and important collectors was also excited. The Danish beer brewer and art collector Carl Jacobsen (whose father had named Carlsberg beer after his son), for example, bought several works for a total sum of 80,000 francs.<sup>31</sup>



6. E. Bauche, Pavillon de l'Alma in 1900, aristotype. Musée Rodin, Paris

The Pavillon de l'Alma was already being called a Musée Rodin in the press,<sup>32</sup> and once the exhibition closed, Rodin had great difficulty parting with it, telling critics that he would love to preserve it as an *atelier-musée*.<sup>33</sup> This could only be realized by reconstructing the building in Meudon, a task that was undertaken in 1901 by Sortais himself.<sup>34</sup> Visitors came from all over the world to see the now internationally acclaimed sculptor and his museum of plaster statues. For instance, there was a laudatory article in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of 21 January 1902 about 'Het museum van Rodin', in which the author wrote that she did not know whether the museum would be opened to the public, but 'for those who are interested in the arts, it should not be difficult to receive an introduction to Rodin. And I do hope for many, that they will ascend to the temple of art at Meudon, radiant with light.'<sup>35</sup>

The realization of a museum of Rodin's oeuvre had to happen. As Véronique Mattiussi argues, the idea of a Musée Rodin was inherent in the personality of the sculptor.<sup>36</sup> Around the 1890s he had begun collecting Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Japanese and medieval sculptures and other objects, as well as plaster casts of fragments from French cathedrals, but when his income increased after the one-man exhibition in 1900, his collection grew significantly.<sup>37</sup> He showed his collection in his garden, in the vestibule of the reconstructed Pavillon de l'Alma in Meudon, on the steps of the façade of the Château d'Issy (which he bought and had reconstructed in Meudon between 1907 and 1910) and in the Villa des Brillants (ill. 1).<sup>38</sup> In addition to buying nearby land, he would buy existing buildings, such as the 'Goulette des Moines', in which he kept his collection of prints and drawings.<sup>39</sup> Around 1905-6 Rodin even had a small building constructed to house part of his collection of Greek and Roman marble statues, which he called his 'musée des Antiques'.<sup>40</sup> Rodin also owned a considerable number of paintings by contemporary artists such as Jules Bastien-Lepage, Eugène Carrière, Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh, some of which were hung in the villa, although the majority were stacked in the small dining room facing the wall.<sup>41</sup>

### The origins of an idea

Rodin's ideas about creating a museum started to crystallize around 1906 or 1907. He told the art critic Otto Grautoff, who visited him in Meudon in 1907, that he wanted to build a museum for his own work and his collection of antiques.<sup>42</sup> Bénédicte Garnier suggests that Rodin was initially thinking of realizing this museum behind the façade of the Château d'Issy at Meudon but may have changed his mind once the Hôtel Biron in Paris came to his attention.<sup>43</sup>

As of 15 October 1908, Rodin rented several rooms on the ground floor of the Hôtel Biron, a building where artists had for some years rented studios. It was the

poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who had written a monograph on Rodin in 1903 and worked as his secretary briefly in 1905, who pointed out the building to him. The first official reference to a possible museum by Rodin himself was in a letter to the politician Paul Escudier in 1909.<sup>44</sup> The building was under threat of demolition, and Rodin, who was a strong supporter of the preservation of architectural heritage, asked if he might realize a Musée Rodin at the Hôtel Biron and live there for the remainder of his life. In exchange, he would donate his entire oeuvre in marble, bronze, plaster and stone, his drawings and his art collection to the French State. Others also took credit: the art critic Gustave Coquiot claimed that he had suggested to the artist the idea of establishing a Musée Rodin in the Hôtel Biron,<sup>45</sup> as did Cladel in her definitive biography of Rodin of 1936.<sup>46</sup> Although the location may have been proposed to him by others, the plan for a personal museum must have gradually developed in Rodin's mind after the positive responses to his 1900 exhibition.

Around the time of Rodin's talk with Grauthoff, Cladel wrote an article for *Le Matin de Bruxelles* in which she recommended the establishment of a Musée Constantin Meunier in Belgium and a Musée Rodin in France.<sup>47</sup> Cladel used the Thorvaldsen Museum as an example for a possible Musée Rodin, describing it as

a large construction without windows, lit through the roof and looking like a tomb, where the Danes have assembled the oeuvre of their national sculptor, universally praised in the early nineteenth century but almost forgotten today. And not just his oeuvre, but his collection of paintings, produced by painters who were his contemporaries in the conventional style, the simple naivety, the pompous manner into which art declined after the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

She wrote that she had visited this museum herself, and it seems very likely that she discussed her impressions with Rodin. Cladel was a close friend of Rodin's in those days, although their friendship was often troubled. She not only helped to organize the exhibitions in Brussels and the Netherlands but also wrote several texts about Rodin. Her series of articles 'Rodin pris sur la vie' ('Rodin portrayed from life') in *La Plume* (1903) had received positive reviews, and she was discussing with Rodin her plan to write his biography.<sup>49</sup> Cladel was aware of the extent of Thorvaldsen's donation to the Danish city of Copenhagen, as is apparent in the quotation above. She felt that France should learn from Denmark's homage to its nation's most prominent artist.

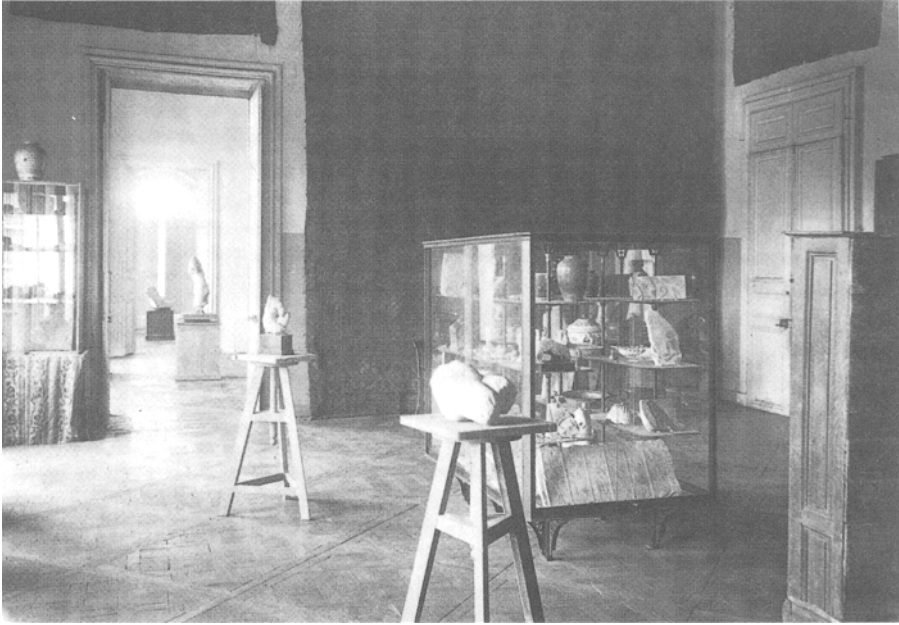
In addition to hearing about the Danish museum from Cladel, Rodin may have heard about it directly from other sources.<sup>50</sup> Ever since his 1900 exhibition he had been in touch with Carl Jacobsen, who in 1897 had opened the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, in which his valuable collection of antique sculptures was exhibited, as well as his collection of nineteenth-century Danish and French

sculptures. Between 1900 and 1912 Jacobsen bought over thirty works by Rodin with the aim of establishing a Rodin room, which he referred to as a 'petit Musée Rodin', within the Glyptotek.<sup>51</sup> Theodor Oppermann, the Glyptotek's curator, visited Rodin several times in Meudon, as did Jacobsen himself,<sup>52</sup> and it is likely that Oppermann, who was later to write a book about the Danish sculptor,<sup>53</sup> discussed the Thorvaldsen Museum with Rodin.

Oppermann's visits took place in 1907, 1908 and 1910, the period in which Rodin started to think about a museum to house his oeuvre and art collection. It was also at that time that a second large collection of Rodin sculptures was being assembled.<sup>54</sup> The Metropolitan Museum in New York bought the majority of the thirty or so Rodin sculptures the museum currently owns around 1910, but John Marshall, the purchasing agent for the Metropolitan, had already visited Rodin's studios in 1907 in order to select works for the museum's Rodin gallery, which opened in 1912.<sup>55</sup> The third large collection of sculptures by Rodin that was put together during his lifetime was donated by Rodin himself in 1914 to the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) in London, as a token of his appreciation for Britain's efforts in the First World War.<sup>56</sup> The existence of these three great Rodin collections abroad may have spurred him, as it did his supporters, to create a French equivalent that would surpass them all.

#### The politics of establishing a museum

The realization of a Musée Rodin was, in contrast to the Thorvaldsen Museum, hotly disputed. The French State agreed to buy the Hôtel Biron in 1911 in order for artists to work and live there, but not with the intention of creating a museum for Rodin.<sup>57</sup> Public opinion, however, was against the idea of a centre for the arts, and the residents were given notice on 1 January 1912.<sup>58</sup> Shortly before this, on 5 September 1911, an article by Coquiot had appeared in *Le Journal*, in which he pleaded for the Hôtel Biron and garden to be preserved to house a Musée Rodin, although the outbuildings and chapel could be demolished if necessary.<sup>59</sup> He referred to the beautiful installation of statues that Rodin himself had organized in the rooms of the Hôtel, as he had done previously in the reconstructed Pavillon de l'Alma in Meudon. According to Coquiot, Rodin had already shown in 1900 that he was a fantastic *metteur en scène*. Pictures by Claude Lémery and an anonymous photographer that Coquiot later included in the publication *Rodin à l'Hôtel de Biron et à Meudon* (1917) illustrate how Rodin showed his sculptures in the rooms on the ground floor of the Hôtel Biron amidst antique sculptures and vases from his collection (ill. 7). Cladel supported Coquiot's article with a piece in *Le Matin* on 27 November 1911. She emphasized the fact that Rodin was also concerned about the preservation of the eighteenth-century building by the architect Jean Aubert.<sup>60</sup>



7. Eugène Druet, Collection of antiques in the Hôtel Biron, December 1913, silver-gelatine print. Musée Rodin, Paris

One of Cladel's arguments in favour of a museum was the fact that an international public as well as art students would be able to enjoy Rodin's oeuvre. Some critics argued that there already was a Rodin gallery in the Metropolitan Museum, so why create a second museum tribute to the sculptor?<sup>61</sup> Cladel, however, justified the museum by stating that if the Americans recognized Rodin's greatness, the French should not fall behind.<sup>62</sup> Again, she pointed out Thorvaldsen's mausoleum as an example of a museum that was: 'dedicated solely to Thorvaldsen's oeuvre'.<sup>63</sup>

In an effort to overcome the opposition, Cladel composed a petition in favour of the realization of the museum, entitled *Pour le Musée Rodin* (1912), which was signed by a long list of influential people. In this she once again referred to Thorvaldsen's as an exemplary personal museum.<sup>64</sup> She also made public the fact that Rodin was willing to donate his entire oeuvre and art collection to the French State. On 22 June the State agreed – on certain conditions. In March 1913 an inventory was made of Rodin's oeuvre and art collection by, among others, Léonce Bénédict, at that time *conservateur* at the Musée du Luxembourg,<sup>65</sup> but Rodin's collection of antiques was not regarded as very valuable.<sup>66</sup> In 1914 Cladel and Bénédict composed a second petition, since there was still considerable resistance to the



idea, while the outbreak of the First World War had held up any progress.<sup>67</sup> But time was running out. Rodin had become an old and sick man, who was no longer actively involved in the concerns about the museum, and only after the appointment in 1915 of a new Minister of Trade, Etienne Clémentel, who turned out to be a great supporter of Rodin's donation to the nation, could the affair eventually be settled.

Rodin officially donated his oeuvre to the French State on 1 April, 13 September and 25 October 1916.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, each of the gifts was fiercely debated in the *Chambre des Députés* and, subsequently, in the Senate. Some thought that the idea of honouring an individual artist with a personal museum was preposterous, while others were opposed to his living at the Hôtel Biron rent-free.<sup>69</sup> As a result, several conditions were imposed when the State finally accepted the gift on 24 December 1916, including the requirement that his oeuvre should be moved from Meudon to Paris as soon as possible at Rodin's own expense. This was carried out shortly after his lifelong companion Rose Beuret had died on 14 February 1917.<sup>70</sup> Rodin himself died on 17 November 1917 in Meudon, which was barely heated because of the wartime coal shortage. Not for a single day had he been able to enjoy free accommodation at the Hôtel Biron.

#### Museum and mausoleum

The heated debates over the establishment of a Musée Rodin and the acceptance of his donation to the French State could not have been in greater contrast to the political reaction to a possible Thorvaldsen museum. There were no long arguments about the acceptance of the donation of his oeuvre and art collection. In fact, the Danish government wanted a Thorvaldsen museum in order to glorify a national hero and to encourage feelings of nationalist pride in the public.<sup>71</sup> During the formative years of the museum, between 1830 and 1848, national liberalism was a growing political force in Denmark. As a result, the government encouraged not only the rich and privileged, but also the people of Copenhagen, to donate money for the realization of the museum.<sup>72</sup> Nationalism had been on the rise in Europe since the late eighteenth century and had resulted in the appropriation of local or national artists in order for their glory to shine on their countries or regions.<sup>73</sup> The opening of artists' houses, such as the *Dürerhaus* in Nuremberg, as national or regional monuments was a result of this.<sup>74</sup> Cladel emphasized in her petition of 1912 the fact that the Danish government did not hesitate to realize an important monument to one of their greatest artists. According to Cladel, Rodin's talents were far greater than Thorvaldsen's, and should France be a lesser country than Denmark by refusing to honour its greatest sculptor?<sup>75</sup>



8. F.C. Lund, *Thorvaldsen's arrival in Copenhagen*, 1838, 1889, colour lithograph after Jørgen Sonne's frieze on the exterior of the Thorvaldsen Museum.  
Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen

As with the inception of the Musée Rodin, it was an art critic, Peder Hjort, who first wrote publicly in 1818 about the idea of establishing a Thorvaldsen Museum in Denmark.<sup>76</sup> Hjort was surprised to learn that the main output of sculptures by Thorvaldsen was going to other European countries, and only a few to Denmark. Having visited Thorvaldsen's studio in Rome, where plaster models of almost all of his sculptures stood around, Hjort suggested that a museum of his entire oeuvre should be realized for the Danish public. According to his biographer Just Mathias Thiele, the concept of a personal museum formed gradually in the minds of both Thorvaldsen and his supporters as a result of remarks visitors to the studio made about the beautiful collection of his work.<sup>77</sup>

The first official documents about the museum date from 1826. Thorvaldsen was thinking about a museum to house his oeuvre and art collection, but was uncertain about the location; it could be either Rome, where he had worked for the greater part of his artistic career (1797-1838), or Copenhagen, or even Munich. In 1828 Thorvaldsen for the first time stated his preference for a museum in Copenhagen.<sup>78</sup> King Frederik VI was contacted unofficially through Count Rantzau von Breitenburg to see whether Denmark would build a museum to house his collections. The King was in favour of the idea, and Thorvaldsen was urged to formalize the arrangement, since there were other parties interested. Ludwig I of Bavaria, for one, believed that Thorvaldsen would donate his oeuvre to Munich. The Danes however, were able to rely on the most recent will that Thorvaldsen had drafted, in 1830, leaving his art collection to the city of Copenhagen, although the



possible donation of his own sculptures was not included. Thorvaldsen wanted to be certain that the city would build an appropriate museum for his oeuvre, which would carry his name, before he agreed to finalize the donation.<sup>79</sup>

Once the architectural design and the financial matters were confirmed in 1837, Thorvaldsen wrote the last version of his will, in which he donated all of his collections, including his own work, to the city of Copenhagen on condition that a museum would be built especially for him and that his collection would remain unaltered.<sup>80</sup> He then accompanied his collection by boat to Denmark, finally arriving on 17 September 1838 in Copenhagen, where he was hailed by the crowd. This event, which was reported in the press and depicted in paintings, acquired a legendary status. Thiele described the mythological effect as the sunlight broke through the clouds, as if Thor himself had sent these northern lights to shine on the arriving ship that carried both Thorvaldsen and his works.<sup>81</sup>

After some difficulties concerning the location and the design for the museum, King Frederik VI made available the site just beside Christiansborg Palace that was occupied by a building housing the royal coaches and wagons. Michael Gottlieb Bindesbøll, who had visited Rome between 1836 and 1838 to study classical models and to consult Thorvaldsen himself, was appointed architect of the museum. The final design was approved in 1839, and construction work began.<sup>82</sup> Parts of the old building were included in the colourful rectangular museum, which combines architectural elements derived from Greek, Etruscan, Egyptian and Roman styles (ill. 8). On the outside, a frieze by Jørgen Sonne (painted

between 1846 and 1850) illustrates Thorvaldsen's heroic arrival in Copenhagen and the delivery of his oeuvre to the museum.<sup>83</sup> Thorvaldsen's tomb is situated in a sunken burial chamber under the centre of the courtyard of the museum and is decorated with white lilies on a blue ground. The idea of placing his body within the personal museum was probably first suggested by Thiele, when construction work on the building had already begun.<sup>84</sup> Thorvaldsen himself gave his consent to the idea before he died on 24 March 1844,<sup>85</sup> and was even consulted about the decoration of his grave.<sup>86</sup> His coffin was transferred from Copenhagen Cathedral to the burial chamber on 6 September 1848, a week before the museum opened.<sup>87</sup>

Like Thorvaldsen, Rodin was buried next to his work. However, he was not buried in or near his Paris museum. Instead, his tomb is located before the façade of the Château d'Issy and therefore in front of his Meudon museum. *The Thinker* (enlarged version 1902-4) rests on his grave. The wish to be buried in his garden in Meudon was probably Rodin's own, considering his love of the garden and the fact that Rose Beuret was buried there before him. Nevertheless, the declaration that the mayor of Meudon wrote to grant permission for the burial sounds more like a promotional brochure than the fulfilment of Rodin's last wishes. He quoted a letter Rodin had supposedly written (although it is more likely that Bénédite wrote it, since Rodin was very ill at the time), and this letter was included in Bénédite's official request for Rodin to be buried in his Meudon garden: 'in order to rest eternally among his creations'.<sup>88</sup> According to the mayor, the grave would become a 'true place of pilgrimage for the admirers of the great sculptor'.<sup>89</sup>

#### Thorvaldsen as a role model

The Thorvaldsen Museum functioned as a model for the Musée Rodin in several ways. As we have seen, it was used by Cladel as an example of a fitting tribute from a nation to one of its most famous sculptors. Moreover, both sculptors donated their oeuvres and art collections to the cities where they were born. Although Meudon became an integral part of Rodin's public life, in particular after 1900, Paris had been the centre of his artistic career. Rodin was a native Parisian and, even though he worked as a decorator in Belgium for several years (1871-77), once he received recognition in Paris he returned and continued to work in the French capital until he died. He rented several studios there, of which the studios he occupied at 182, rue de l'Université are the best known. After acquiring the Villa des Brillants, he started to divide his time between Meudon and Paris. He used to spend the mornings in Meudon, discussing matters with his secretary and overseeing the work of his assistants, and the afternoons in Paris. Although Rodin did initially think about Meudon as a possible location for his museum, he later gave

up on the idea. One of his secretaries, Marcelle Martin (later Tirel), suggested he should create a museum in Meudon when he had grown tired and disappointed by the endless political debates, but he told her there would be too few visitors to make it profitable, and he was probably right.<sup>90</sup>

Rodin's ideas about a personal museum resemble Thorvaldsen's in numerous ways.<sup>91</sup> Firstly, both sculptors had an educational goal: they believed that offering the public an overview of their oeuvres in combination with their collections of antiques and contemporary art would provide a place of study for art students and possibly for others too. Secondly, they both considered it important to keep their creative output together in a coherent display, a goal that Thorvaldsen mentioned explicitly in his last will of 1838. This was possible for them as sculptors, since it was customary to keep plaster versions of original works of art in the studio for future orders. And finally, with the creation of personal museums, their reputations would be perpetuated after their deaths.

Thorvaldsen (like Rodin) donated not only sketch models and most of his full-scale models, but also many of his drawings, a number of casts and several marbles made under his direction, as well as his large collection of antiques.<sup>92</sup> This collection included ancient Egyptian works, antique glass, gems and coins (mainly Greek), vases and objects in terracotta, Greek and Roman marbles and casts of antique sculptures. Both sculptors owned a great number of contemporary paintings that were also included in their donations, and they both gave their books and personal belongings. The donation of their personal papers, which in the case of Rodin include a huge number of letters and press cuttings, are of particular interest.<sup>93</sup> The museums for Thorvaldsen and Rodin therefore became not only monuments to great national sculptors, mausolea, personal museums, and places of study for fellow artists, they are also important art historical archives.

In the case of the French sculptor, the two locations for the Musée Rodin fulfil slightly different functions, which are combined within one building in the Thorvaldsen Museum. As Bénédict had planned, Paris still functions as the museum of the *grand maître*, offering the public a chronological display of his most important sculptures in marble, bronze and terracotta, while Meudon shows a large number of plaster models. In Meudon the visitor is a pilgrim, who, if he takes the most obvious route, will visit the villa (including the bedroom in which Rodin died), walk through the garden, then stop for a moment of contemplation at his grave, before entering the new pavilion.

Rodin and Thorvaldsen represented very different artistic prototypes during their lives. From the beginning, the museum for Thorvaldsen was seen as a monument to the greatest Danish sculptor, while the struggles that surrounded the realization of Rodin's museum were used by his supporters to cultivate the myth of the unrecognized genius.<sup>94</sup> However, Rodin's museum fits seamlessly within the tradition of personal museums devoted to academic artists that developed

during the nineteenth century. Despite the debates about the museum, it was eventually realized, thus enhancing Rodin's reputation as a *grand maître*, a status that has only increased since his death, in particular after the so-called 'Rodin revival' in the 1950s, when art historian Albert E. Elsen started to promote Rodin's work in America. Conversely, the cult that surrounded Thorvaldsen during his lifetime quickly diminished after his death.

The two museums devoted to Rodin belong to two traditions: that of the monographic museum and that of the opening of the artist's house and studio to the public, although the studios at Meudon have unfortunately been demolished. Both museum types were inspired by the nineteenth-century cult of the artist and they reflect the growing status that was attributed at first only to academic artists, but later to modern artists as well. With the rise of the modern, anti-academic artist, disagreements surrounding possible donations and personal museums have grown enormously. The Musée Rodin seems to symbolize this transformation; Rodin was successful, but not uncontroversial; he was modern, but what is more, at the deepest level, an academic who longed for recognition of his genius.

## NOTES

This essay is an elaborated version of part of the chapter on Auguste Rodin in the dissertation 'De biografische behoefte', or *The lure of the biographical. Influences on the biographical image making of modern artists. Auguste Rodin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Francis Bacon*. This forthcoming Dutch dissertation will be defended spring 2010 at VU University, Amsterdam.

1. Ella Reitsma, 'Lust en Angst. Gedroomd museum van Gustave Moreau', *Het Huis van de Kunstenaar*, Amsterdam 2001, pp. 23-29, p. 26.
2. Oskar Bätschmann, *The artist in the modern world: The conflict between market and self-expression*, Cologne 1997, chapter 3, 'The cult of the artist', pp. 81-121.
3. Christine Hoh-Slodczyk, *Das Haus des Künstler im 19. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1985, pp. 191-93.
4. Photothèque of the 'Institut Catholique de Paris', [http://www.icp.fr/icp/pdf/phototheque\\_depouillement2.pdf](http://www.icp.fr/icp/pdf/phototheque_depouillement2.pdf).

5. Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian artist: Artists' lifewritings in Britain ca. 1870-1910*, Cambridge 2003, p. 240.

6. Bätschmann, *The artist in the modern world*, p. 91. The monument or *Tempio* that Canova started to build for himself, which was completed after his death, does not have a museum function like the Thorvaldsen Museum, but it does serve as a mausoleum. It was opened in 1830.

7. Truman H. Bartlett, in Albert E. Elsen (ed.), *Auguste Rodin: Readings on his life and work*, Englewood Cliffs 1965, pp. 13-109, pp. 88-89.

8. For instance, Félicien Champsaur refers to an often repeated anecdote about the sculptor Jules Dalou, who said to Rodin that he should be glad not to have had a formal education, since he himself often felt obstructed by it. Champsaur, 'Celui que revient de l'enfer: Auguste Rodin', *Le Figaro*, supplement, 16 January 1886, in Ruth Butler (ed.), *Rodin in perspective*, Englewood Cliffs 1980, pp. 48-52, p. 48.

9. Marie-Pierre Delclaux, *Rodin: A brilliant life*, Paris 2003, gives a thorough description of Rodin's education. Her account is illustrated by pages from Rodin's early sketchbooks, owned by the Musée Rodin.

10. Frederick Lawton used this organization in

the index to his monograph *The life and work of Auguste Rodin*, London 1906; and Judith Cladel, Rodin's best-known biographer, quotes Rodin telling her how much he was influenced by his fellow-artisan Constant Simon while working on the decoration of cathedrals. Judith Cladel, *Rodin: The man and his art*, trans. J. K. Star, New York 1918, pp. 113-16.

11. Ruth Butler, 'Rodin and the Paris Salon', in Albert E. Elsen (ed.), exhib. cat. *Rodin rediscovered*, Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1981-82, pp. 19-49, p. 46.
12. Harald Tesan, *Thorvaldsen und seine Bildhauerschule in Rom*, Cologne, Weimar & Vienna 1998, p. 57.
13. Peter Springer, 'Thorvaldsen zwischen Markt und Museum', in exhib. cat. *Künstlerleben in Rom: Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844). Der dänische Bildhauer und seine deutsche Freunde*, Nuremberg (Germanisches Nationalmuseum) 1991, pp. 211-21, p. 213. Thorvaldsen employed between thirty and forty assistants after 1815. In the last two decades of his life, Rodin employed about fifty assistants. Daniel Rosenfeld, 'Rodin's carved sculpture', in Elsen, *Rodin rediscovered*, pp. 81-102, p. 90.
14. Bättschmann, *The artist in the modern world*, p. 87.
15. *Künstlerleben in Rom*, no. 9.2, p. 699.
16. Michael Klant, *Künstler bei der Arbeit, von Fotografen gesehen*, Ostfildern-Ruit 1995, p. 13.
17. *Künstlerleben in Rom*, no. 5.23, pp. 573-74.
18. Such as a photograph by Luswergh of the architect Luigi Canina (1795-1856) in exhib. cat. *Rome in early photographs: The age of Pius IX. Photographs 1846-1878 from Roman and Danish collections*, Copenhagen (Thorvaldsen Museum) 1977, no. 99.
19. Léonce Bénédict, cat. *Musée Rodin. Catalogue sommaire des œuvres d'Auguste Rodin et autres œuvres d'art de la donation Rodin*, Paris (Musée Rodin) 1919, [n.p.].
20. Antoinette le Normand-Romain and Hélène Marraud, *Rodin à Meudon: La Villa des Brillants*, Paris 1996, p. 27.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Jean Villemer, in Butler (ed.), *Rodin in perspective*, pp. 91-92. 'Le vernissage' originally appeared in *Le Figaro*, 1 May 1898.
24. Frederic V. Grunfeld, *Rodin: A biography*, New York 1987, p. 383.
25. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Léon

Maillard Correspondance. Maillard contacted Rodin as early as 1894 about a possible monograph. Letter of Maillard to Rodin, 18 April 1894.

26. John Sillevs, 'Rodin's first one-man show', *Burlington Magazine*, December 1995, pp. 832-37; and Sillevs, 'Rodin in Den Haag', *Pulchri Studio* 22 (1994), no. 4, pp. 14-15.
27. Ruth Butler 'Rodin et la belle époque', in Josette Grandazzi (ed.), exhib. cat. *Rodin en 1900: L'Exposition de l'Alma*, Paris (Musée du Luxembourg) 2001, pp. 37-42, p. 39.
28. Joy Newton, 'Portrait of an art critic: Gustave Geffroy', *Laurels* 59 (1988-89), no. 3, pp. 163-88, p. 179.
29. Véronique Mattiussi, 'La Rodinière', in Grandazzi, *Rodin en 1900*, pp. 53-59, p. 56.
30. There were also separate rooms where drawings and photographs of Rodin's work were exhibited.
31. Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Rodin: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, La collection du brasseur Carl Jacobsen à la Glyptothèque – et œuvres apparentées*, Copenhagen 1988, p. 42.
32. Jacques Vilain, 'Less is more', in Grandazzi, *Rodin en 1900*, pp. 14-22, p. 22. The word 'museum' appears for the first time in the written permission of the 'Ministre de l'Instruction Publique', Georges Leygues, of 25 August 1899 for Rodin to construct a pavilion at the place de l'Alma. Paris, Archives du Musée Rodin, Bibliothèque. Véronique Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état des collections Rodin', *Muséologie* 1992-93, à l'intention de M. Roland Schaer, l'Ecole du Louvre (unpublished), p. 15.
33. Mattiussi, 'La Rodinière', p. 58, n. 28: 'Rodin sur le pavé', *Le Petit Bleu de Paris*, 20 December 1900.
34. Le Normand-Romain and Marraud, *Rodin à Meudon*, p. 36 and pp. 52-54. The rebuilt pavilion was located near the villa, but it fell into disrepair after Rodin's death. It was replaced by a new building, designed by Henri Favier between 1929 and 1931, now located behind the façade of the Château d'Issy.
35. 'Voor wie belangstellen in kunst, kan het niet moeilijk zijn een introductie bij Rodin te krijgen. En ik hoop voor velen dat zij zullen opgaan naar den kunsttempel van Meudon, stralend van licht.' Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, press cuttings Rodin, C. de J. v. B. en D (probably Cecile de Jong van Beek en Donk,



correspondent for the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* in Paris), 'Het museum van Rodin', 21 January 1902.

36. Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état', p. 3.

37. Bénédicte Garnier, exhib. cat. *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth: A sculptor's collection*, Paris (Musée Rodin) 2002, pp. 7, 10.

38. Le Normand-Romain and Marraud, *Rodin à Meudon*, pp. 40, 49.

39. Garnier, *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth*, p. 10.

40. Le Normand-Romain and Marraud, *Rodin à Meudon*, p. 40; and Garnier, *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth*, p. 10.

41. Paul Gsell, 'Propos de Rodin sur l'art et les artistes', *La Revue*, no. 21, 1 November 1907, pp. 95-107, p. 96.

42. Garnier, *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth*, p. 11, n. 12; Otto Grautoff, 'Bei Auguste Rodin', *Tägliche Rundschau*, Berlin, 8 October 1907.

43. Garnier, *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth*, p. 11.

44. Rodin to Escudier, end of 1909, in Alain Beausire and Florence Cadouot (ed.), *Correspondence de Rodin*, 4 vols., Paris 1987, vol. 3, letter 103, p. 92.

45. Gustave Coquiott, 'Quelques mots', in *Rodin à l'Hôtel de Biron et à Meudon*, Paris 1917, p. 129. In a letter to Rodin of 24 January 1914 Coquiott writes that he feels he should be the one to realize the museum for Rodin, since it was he who had launched the idea. Paris, Archives du Musée Rodin, Correspondance Gustave Coquiott.

46. Judith Cladel, *Rodin: Sa vie glorieuse, sa vie inconnue*, Paris 1936, p. 265.

47. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Musée Rodin, Presse 1907-1919, Judith Cladel, handwritten draft, 'Rodin, les œuvres en Belgique, un musée à créer', for *Le Matin de Bruxelles*, 24 June 1907.

48. Ibid. '[...] vaste construction sans fenêtres, éclairée par la toiture, et d'aspect funéraire, où les Danois ont rassemblé l'œuvre de leur sculpteur national, universellement glorieux au début du XIXe siècle, à peu près universellement oublié aujourd'hui. Non seulement son œuvre, mais sa collection de tableaux, production des peintres, ses contemporains, en ce genre poncif, cette aisé naïveté, cette allure déclamatoire où défailloit la force artistique après le XVIIIe siècle.'

49. Cladel, *Rodin: Sa vie glorieuse*, p. 67.

50. As far as we know, Rodin did not visit Denmark himself. In the Archives of the Musée Rodin there are no documents referring to possible visits to Copenhagen or the Thorvaldsen

Museum nor are there any press cuttings about the Thorvaldsen Museum.

51. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Danemark-Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Carl Jacobsen). The remark about a 'Petit Musée Rodin' is made by Jacobsen in a letter to Rodin dated 9 June 1904.

52. For instance, Oppermann visited Rodin in March 1907 (see Oppermann to Rodin, 1 April 1907) and November 1908 (Oppermann to Rodin, 3 December 1908); Jacobson visited Meudon in 1907 as well, but it remains uncertain from his letter of 8 August 1907 to Rodin if he visited him together with Oppermann or separately. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Danemark-Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Carl Jacobsen).

53. Theodor Oppermann, *Thorvaldsen Hans Barndom og Ungdom 1768-1797*, Copenhagen 1924.

54. Clare Vincent, 'Rodin at the Metropolitan Museum of Art – a history of the collection', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (1981), no. 4, pp. 3-47, p. 28.

55. Ibid.

56. Cladel, *Rodin: Sa vie glorieuse*, p. 28.

57. Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état', p. 21.

58. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Musée Rodin Presse 1907-1919, Ed. L. 'Les locataires de l'Hôtel Biron ont reçu leur congé', *L'Echo de Paris*, 26 September 1911.

59. Ibid., Gustave Coquiott, 'Un Musée Rodin dans l'Hôtel Biron', *Le Matin*, 5 September 1911.

60. Ibid., Judith Cladel, 'Le plus grand sculpteur français le maître Rodin va être mis à la porte de l'Hôtel Biron qu'il contribua à sauver – C'est le moment de créer à Paris le Musée Rodin', *Le Matin*, 27 November 1911.

61. Ibid., Gustave Geffroy, 'Gloire à Rodin!', *La Petite Gironde*, 22 September 1916.

62. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Bibliothèque, Judith Cladel, 'Pour le Musée Rodin', 1912, p. 5. Most of the text of the petition was published in *Le Matin* on 27 November and 18 December 1911 and 1 January 1912.

63. 'pour le consacrer uniquement à l'œuvre de Thorvaldsen'. Cladel, 'Le plus grand sculpteur français'.

64. Cladel, 'Pour le Musée Rodin', p. 4.

65. Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état', p. 26.

66. Garnier, *Rodin: Antiquity is my youth*, p. 13. It was valued at 365,575 francs. Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état', p. 30.

67. Some people felt it was inappropriate to honour an artist with a personal museum during wartime. Cladel, *Rodin: The man and his art*, p. 356.
68. Mattiussi, 'La donation à l'état', pp. 29-30.
69. Ibid., p. 25.
70. Marcelle Tirel, *The last years of Rodin*, Paris 1925, p. 163.
71. Stig Miss, 'Das Thorvaldsen Museum', in *Künstlerleben in Rom*, pp. 341-54, pp. 352-53.
72. Siegfried Gohr, 'Thorvaldsens Museum', in Siegfried Gohr and Gerhard Bott, exhib. cat. *Bertel Thorvaldsen: Skulpturen, Modelle, Bozzetti, Handzeichnungen*, Cologne (Wallraf-Richartz-Museum) 1977, pp. 89-92, p. 90.
73. Hoh-Slodczyk, *Das Haus des Künstler*, p. 30.
74. Eduard Hüttinger, *Künstlerhäuser von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart*, Zurich 1985, p. 23.
75. Cladel, 'Pour le Musée Rodin', p. 4.
76. Miss, 'Das Thorvaldsen Museum', pp. 346-47.
77. Ibid., p. 347, n. 23.
78. Ibid., p. 347.
79. Gohr, 'Thorvaldsens Museum', p. 90.
80. Bättschmann, *The artist in the modern world*, p. 90, nn. 34, 36. The wills are discussed in detail in Just Mathias Thiele, *Thorvaldsen's Leben nach der eigenhändigen Aufzeichnungen, nachgelassenen Papieren und dem Briefwechsel des Künstlers*, Leipzig 1852-56, vol. 2.
81. Thiele quoted in Bättschmann, *The artist in the modern world*, p. 88.
82. Several designs by Bindesbøll for the museum, as well as designs by other architects who wanted to obtain the commission, are reproduced in 'Ein Denkmal klassizistischer Erbauung: Thorvaldsens Museum in Kopenhagen', in *Künstlerleben in Rom*, pp. 700-5.
83. Bjarne Jørnoes, Torben Melander and Anne Sophie Urne (eds.), *The Thorvaldsen Museum*, Copenhagen 1995, p. 10; and *Künstlerleben in Rom*, no. 9.11, pp. 705-6.
84. Bättschmann, *The artist in the modern world*, p. 91.
85. Jørnoes, Melander and Urne, *The Thorvaldsen Museum*, p. 9.
86. *Künstlerleben in Rom*, no. 9.13, pp. 708-9.
87. <http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/history>.
88. 'afin de reposer éternellement au milieu même du peuple de ses créations'. Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, Nécrologie, Mort de Rodin, declaration of the mayor of Meudon, 6 June 1917. Rodin had written a letter dated 5 April 1917 in which he asked to be buried in his garden in Meudon. It is very likely that Bénédicté wrote the letter, considering Rodin's weak health at the time and the fact that it was accompanied by the official request by Bénédicté.
89. 'véritable lieu de pèlerinage pour les admirateurs de ce grand sculpteur'. Ibid.
90. Tirel, *The last years of Rodin*, p. 46.
91. Hoh-Slodczyk, *Das Haus des Künstler*, p. 29.
92. Jørnoes, Melander and Urne, *The Thorvaldsen Museum*, pp. 10-11.
93. The Thorvaldsen Museum recently realized a digital archive of Thorvaldsen's letters. The Thorvaldsen Letter Archives is a database situated at the Thorvaldsens Museum Homepage: [http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/letter\\_archives](http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/letter_archives). The Archives currently contain 2,951 of the more than 4,500 preserved letters from, to and about the sculptor. The letters are provided with comments, indexes of persons and subjects, advanced searching possibilities etc.
94. Cladel, *Rodin: Sa vie glorieuse*. One quarter of the book is dedicated to the difficulties over the establishment of a Musée Rodin.



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1. Edouard Detaille, *The dream*, 1888, oil on canvas, 300 × 400 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

# **Seeing Visions, Painting Visions: On psychology and representation under the early Third Republic**

Richard Thomson

In 1888 the vision took on an unexpected currency in French culture. In September Paul Gauguin, at that point an obscure avant-garde artist working in the small Breton port of Pont-Aven, painted his *Vision of the sermon* (see p. 6, ill. 1). Already at the Paris Salon, which opened in May, the celebrated military painter Edouard Detaille had exhibited *The dream* (*Le rêve*) (ill. 1). The two paintings could hardly have been more different: an abruptly drawn and inventively coloured canvas of local peasant women gazing at Jacob wrestling with the Angel, and a large, highly finished tableau of sleeping French soldiers dreaming of their glorious military antecedents. October 1888 saw the publication of Emile Zola's novel *Le rêve*. Zola, working in an entirely different medium, had surprised a readership attuned to his frank, sometimes gross, naturalism with a novel about a pure, pious young woman who has visions of saints. These diverse cultural manifestations were being paralleled in psychological research. For it was at this time that young medical researchers such as Alfred Binet and Pierre Janet were giving clinical identity to what they called a second state of consciousness underlying normal thought – in other words the unconscious – which Janet would categorize in his *L'automatisme*

*psychologique*, published in 1889.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as the 1880s passed into the 1890s, different mental states were increasingly being understood by clinicians and represented in varied cultural forms for wider public consumption.

But what seems to have been a convergence of interest in irrational or unconscious forms of cerebral experience actually manifested itself in very divergent arenas. Psychologists like Binet and Janet were addressing the professional constituency of their medical *confrères*. The very different *Rêves* of Zola, whose novel had been serialized for the middle-class readership of *La Revue illustrée* since April, and Demaille, whose painting was acclaimed at the Salon and purchased by the State for the national collections, reached out to very wide publics. Gauguin's *Vision*, on the other hand, was known only to a small coterie of colleagues in his immediate avant-garde circle.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the very fact that creative figures with such distinct ambitions, outlets and audiences were apparently concerning themselves with issues that at least overlapped, if not perhaps directly engaged, with groundbreaking clinical research in the relatively new but burgeoning field of psychology encourages one to ask why this interest in the vision and irrational experience seems to have been so prevalent in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and how it could have created an unexpected – yet surely independently realized – consensus between such disparate figures. What were the causes and outcomes of this common fascination, and how consistent was it across contemporary French culture? How was visual representation involved in the transmission of the new understanding of the unconscious and irrational? And to what extent were such modern psychological concepts employed, misunderstood, trivialized or ignored by artists? To tackle these questions it will be necessary to explore some typologies of representation in the years around 1890, locating them in wider social and cultural contexts.

France's current political system, the Third Republic, had been in place since 1870, but it was not until about 1880 that the regime got into gear, with a succession of determinedly ideological governments pushing forward republican programmes. The Republic vigorously promoted its identity as a positivist, forward-looking regime. It set great store by technological and scientific progress, using modern knowledge against the traditional values of its political enemies. The Republic was keen to wrest education from the Catholic Church in order to control the minds of future generations. Against what it saw as the Church's hierarchy and superstition the Republic set *égalité* and science. In the visual arts the Republic favoured naturalistic forms of representation, because these were legible to the widest possible public and so consistent with its ostensibly egalitarian ideology, explanatory and so frankly educational, and finally factual and so founded on proven evidence of the physical world. How could a society that placed so much value on rationality accommodate and represent the irrational?



2. After André Brouillet, *A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière*, 1887, etching by Eugène Pirodion. Musée de l'Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris, Paris

### Articulating *la psychologie nouvelle*

Many of these issues coincide in *A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière* (ill. 2), exhibited by André Brouillet at the Salon of 1887. Painted in an apparently objective, naturalist manner, the painting claims to be a factual account of something seen, a scientific and educational event. It represents Jean-Martin Charcot, director of the Salpêtrière mental hospital, lecturing about his research on hysteria. He is attentively watched by an array of republican intellectuals, among them Philippe Burty, an art critic and inspector in the Ministry of Fine Arts, Jules Claretie, writer, journalist and recently appointed administrator of the Comédie Française, Alfred Naquet, an anti-clerical deputy responsible for the 1884 divorce law, and the campaigning doctor Désiré-Magloire Bourneville, editor of *Le Progrès médical*, which campaigned for the laicization of hospitals and the removal of nuns as nurses.<sup>3</sup> Brouillet's painting is a staged group portrait of men of influence in varied fields



3. Georges Moreau de Tours, *Patients in a state of fascination at the Charité hospital (Department of Dr Luys)*, 1890, oil on canvas, 121.5 × 158.5 cm.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims

of public life, all steeped in republicanism, taking on new scientific ideas for dissemination into the national culture via their different channels. Charcot himself was a dedicated republican who owed his chair in neurology to political influence; it was inaugurated in January 1882 on the initiative of his friend Léon Gambetta during his short-lived premiership.<sup>4</sup> A pioneer of *la psychologie nouvelle*, Charcot's clinical research, notably about hysteria and the suggestibility of the human mind, could be used for republican ends, not least to discredit the Church, for 'one of the principal revelations of the Charcot school was to show that what had previously been taken for possession by the devil and other supernatural, religious and convulsionary states [...] were in fact cases of hysteria.'<sup>5</sup> In addition, Charcot's methods – using imagery, and in particular photography, to record, analyse and teach his clinical findings – were distinctly progressive. Three years after Brouillet showed his homage to Charcot, Georges Moreau de Tours, himself the son of an eminent psychologist, exhibited *Patients in a state of fascination at the Charité hospital (Department of Dr Luys)* [*Les fascinés de la Charité (Service de*



*Dr. Luys*)] (ill. 3) at the Salon des Artistes Français. This painting depicts a mirror device with model birds ‘fascinating’ suggestible patients, women of different classes and at least one man.<sup>6</sup> The range of responses that they manifest – apathy, fear, surprise, ecstasy – is observed by the outer ring of doctors. On the one hand the viewer is complicit with the doctors, observing the patients; on the other, our viewpoint is that of the seated patients themselves. Both Brouillet’s and Moreau de Tours’s paintings satisfied republican ideology: factual and legible in their naturalist observation, scientific and progressive in their subjects, altogether modern.

How did *la psychologie nouvelle* in the 1880s and 1890s understand the workings of the mind? Charcot specialized in hysteria, which initially he linked to epilepsy as *hystéro-épilepsie*.<sup>7</sup> Using techniques such as hypnotism, and careful observation to record the different stages of hysterical fits, Charcot and colleagues like Binet, Janet and Paul Richer established that there were two levels of mental activity, the conscious and the unconscious. These were then understood in terms of the higher and lower faculties, in other words, reason, judgement or choice as opposed to sensation, motor response or instinct. This revealed that we all have double aspects to our personalities, the unconscious functioning simultaneously with the conscious, both coexisting in the waking state. Studying personality disorders, Charcot and his colleagues concentrated on hysteria, which was understood as ‘a manifestation of neurological disturbance caused by functional lesions of the central nervous system’. Symptoms included ‘double consciousness, somnambulism, ...hallucination, ...intellectual, language and visual disturbances, ...yawning, laughing’: a somewhat all-embracing diagnosis.<sup>8</sup> His patients were mostly female, but Charcot discovered that men could also be hysterics. He insisted that not everybody was suggestible or susceptible to having their lower faculties exposed, while Dr Hippolyte Bernheim and his Nancy school stipulated (correctly) that everybody is. Whatever the disputes in clinical circles, by the late 1880s the well informed public sphere was aware of recent psychological debate, and notions drawn from *la psychologie nouvelle* were becoming an increasingly common means of understanding behaviour in the wider society.

Psychology was not only a relatively new science, exploring dimensions of the human mind. Its discoveries gave a scientific basis for kinds of experience – for instance the vision – which had hitherto been explicable only in religious terms. Psychology thus served as a useful weapon for republican anticlericalism. In addition, because psychology touched on common experience and affected everybody, it became a matter of common interest. This functioned at different levels. At the cheaper, sensational end were hypnotists who painlessly stuck needles through their subjects’ limbs or balanced them between two chairs as a spectacle for the *café-concert*. At the élite end were symbolist artists and *littérateurs*, for whom ideas of suggestion and evocation were paramount. However, we need to be aware

that the new discoveries of psychology, while filtering into the wider culture, were doing so in an inconsistent manner, haphazardly dependent on the interests and information of the individual.

#### Visions spiritual, literary, nationalistic and historical

The Third Republic had inherited the image and impact of a very particular visionary. Beginning in February 1858, the adolescent peasant girl Bernadette Soubirous had a sequence of visions of the Virgin Mary near Lourdes in the Pyrenees. What at first had only relatively local significance burgeoned in the years immediately after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, which saw the birth of the Third Republic. Indeed, during the intense months of the war visionary experiences had proliferated. In January 1871 children in Pontmain (Mayenne) had a vision of the Virgin, who urged them to pray to halt the Prussian advance; there were many apparitions in occupied Alsace; and a statue of the Virgin in a Nancy convent blinked when begged to save France. Pilgrimages to Lourdes began on national scale in 1873, and the growing importance of other holy sites such as Notre-Dame d'Issoudun and the shrine of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial articulated the Catholic plea for God's forgiveness of the nation's sins in the wake of the catastrophic war.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this period the grotto at Lourdes where Bernadette had had her visions attracted tens of thousands to the annual August pilgrimage. Images in popular Catholic periodicals propagandized the power of one person's vision to motivate huge crowds. By the 1880s Lourdes was a forceful expression of Catholic devotion and resistance at a time when the Republic was enacting punitive legislation to control the power of Church and, in particular, to break its influence on the education of the nation's children. In retaliation republican medical men attacked Lourdes on the grounds that it encouraged an atmosphere of mass hysteria and was a breeding ground for infection.<sup>10</sup> Thus Lourdes – the significance of which was based on a vision – became a site of struggle between Church and Republic. Ironically, it eventually caused the two opposing ideologies to tip towards each other. In 1883 the Church authorities at Lourdes set up a medical bureau to check claims of miracles; on the one hand a defensive step, to counteract charges of spurious claims, on the other it was combative, the Church using science to prove the power of faith. In his last published article, 'La foi qui guérit' ('The faith that heals') of 1892, even Charcot, while insisting that anyone being cured at Lourdes was by definition an hysteric, acknowledged that faith could be more suggestible in some patients than medicine, and admitted in certain cases recommending pilgrimage.<sup>11</sup>

On its appearance in 1888 Zola's *Le rêve* astonished his readership. Whereas its immediate predecessor, *La terre* (1887), had carried Zola's naturalism into the

frankest realms of the sexual and violent, *Le rêve* was a novel with an almost fairytale character, in which the heroine Angélique is brought up in great piety in a northern French cathedral town. She has visions of saints, falls for a rich, beautiful young man with noble dreams, marries him, and dies: an ostensibly Catholic novel by an avowedly republican writer. Zola wrote it as a mollifying contrast to *La terre*, which had attracted rebukes even from naturalist allies. But in the context of his twenty-novel Rougon-Macquart series, *Le rêve* was also a fictional 'experiment': can an innately vicious Rougon be changed by Catholicism? (Yes, is the conclusion, but she will not survive.)<sup>12</sup> What is significant about the text of *Le rêve* is that, while it is riddled with daydreams of romance and visions of saints – in psychological terms the life of the unconscious – nowhere does it use the clinical language of *la psychologie nouvelle*. Zola, despite being modern and scientific in his intellectual ambitions and republican in his political instincts, does not seem to have known or engaged with it in 1888.<sup>13</sup> *Le rêve* came to terms with Catholicism but not psychology. This makes a curious contrast to Zola's erstwhile collaborator and fellow-naturalist novelist Guy de Maupassant, whose short story 'Le horla', published in May 1887, deals explicitly with mental breakdown and includes a passage in which a woman is hypnotized by a doctor. Here, then, is a contrasting example of the haphazard way in which even well-informed writers might deal with *la psychologie nouvelle* in the late 1880s: one complicit, the other disengaged.

The second *The dream* of 1888, Detaille's Salon painting, brings us back to visual imagery. The picture is a combination of the material world – the French soldiers sleeping around their campfires and stacked rifles as the day of battle dawns – and the unconscious dimension of their shared dream. This is represented in a muted colour range, thus detaching the dreamt from the tactile naturalism of the physical, and envisions the heroes of French military *gloire* since the army of the First Republic at the battle of Valmy of 1792, thus giving the painting a rhetoric that is explicitly republican. Detaille stood for a particular kind of right-wing republicanism, and *The dream* was in all likelihood a calculated gesture, exhibited at the Salon when the militaristic nationalism of General Boulanger was at its height. Purchased for the State and widely reproduced via print and photograph, Detaille's *The dream* became a national icon, so successful because it was tactfully vague about the enemy, insistently suggestive about French military will, and subtly evocative about the republican notions of the nation-in-arms and the *fraternité* uniting French soldiery.<sup>14</sup>

One of the mythic national figures was one in whose life a vision had been the defining moment: Joan of Arc. Joan was a contested and polyvalent image. To the Church and to monarchists she had been driven by her piety and seen the Dauphin crowned king; to nationalists she was the embodiment of France's determination to expel invaders from the nation's soil; to republicans she stood for *égalité*, someone from the *bas peuple* who by merit had become a national leader.<sup>15</sup> Not only was



the myth of Joan manipulable and disputed, but it was also adjusted as *la psychologie nouvelle* became more and more current in contemporary thinking. This is evident in the shifting way images of Joan were treated in contemporary art critical discourse. Jules Bastien-Lepage exhibited his *Joan of Arc hearing the voices* (ill. 4) at the Salon of 1880. Reviewing it there, both the conservative aristocrat Philippe de Chennevières and the cynical naturalist Joris-Karl Huysmans discussed the figure in terms of sleep – the former seeing her as a somnambulist, the latter as if she has just woken after an uncomfortable night. Huysmans did glibly mention mental illness, but only to caricature the picture; he smirked that as she can see what is behind her she must be deranged.<sup>16</sup> It seems that in 1880 the visionary aspect of Bastien's painting of the Joan of Arc story was not interpreted using the diagnostic terminology of *la psychologie nouvelle*. However, by the time the picture was shown again, both at the retrospective show of Bastien's work staged the year after his premature death in 1884 and at the Exposition Universelle of 1889, more professional psychological language was being employed in art critical prose. In 1885, for instance, Roger Marx remarked on 'the hallucinated face', while in 1889

4. Jules Bastien-Lepage,  
*Joan of Arc hearing the voices*,  
 1879, oil on canvas,  
 254 × 279.4 cm.  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
 New York, Gift of Erwin Davis

5. Jules-Eugène Lenepveu,  
*Joan of Arc, shepherdess at  
 Domrémy*, 1889, oil on canvas  
 marouflé to the wall,  
 462 × 221 cm. Panthéon, Paris



Paul Mantz referred to Joan's 'mystical ecstasy'.<sup>17</sup> Mantz's praise of Bastien for trying to represent as accurately as possible a facial expression which no model could possibly sustain implicitly recognized the clinical difference between what could be acted out in a conscious state and what could only be lived out in an unconscious, visionary one. What the naturalist Bastien-Lepage had tried to achieve, the older academic artist Jules-Eugène Lenepveu essentially ignored in his large canvas of Joan hearing voices (ill. 5), one of four murals charting the saint's life painted for the Panthéon between 1886 and 1890. This painting, executed for a major public building by an artist aware of its iconic national identity, presented an anodyne Joan, simply startled rather than ecstatically visionary. Lenepveu divided his representation into two elements, to the right the 'feminine' part she is to leave (home, sheep, spinning) and to the left the 'masculine' part she is to adopt (physicality, castle, the sword proffered by the saint). But Lenepveu, the seventy-year-old former director of the Académie de France in Rome, was too out-of-touch to articulate the theme in psychological terms, relying on stock sexual stereotypes.

Younger artists responded differently. In 1888 Charles Maurin submitted to the Salon a painting of Joan of Arc (now lost) which had been modelled on a young woman patient he had observed at the Salpêtrière. The quasi-scientific naturalism of Maurin's method was matched by the quasi-clinical language of the critic Arsène Alexandre: 'The result of the study was this figure, with a disturbing quality because of its mixture of heroism and madness; heroism in the gesture, madness in the eyes.' Alexandre's description of the painting as 'profoundly modern' applied equally to his prose; both artist and critic made the effort to be 'scientific'.<sup>18</sup> Three years later a *Joan of Arc hearing the voices* by Alexandre Séon (ill. 6) was rejected by the Salon Nationale des Beaux-Arts, though it was accepted for the first Rose+Croix Salon in 1892. At least one young critic defending Séon's painting (known only from a reproduction) couched his support in explicitly clinical terminology. Writing in *La Plume* at the time of its rejection in 1891 Alphonse Germain argued that Séon's Joan was represented 'in a completely new way [...] standing, hypnotized in an extreme contraction'. He went on: 'The spasm of her eyelids, the upper one curved back above a strangely crystalline iris, and her clenched hands with the thumbs outside are those of an hysteric in a trance.' Germain implied that the jury of the Salon Nationale des Beaux-Arts spurned the painting both because it was too specific in its representation of a clinical state and used the 'recent discoveries' of avant-garde chromatics.<sup>19</sup> It seems likely that Séon, like Maurin, was aware of the researches of the Salpêtrière, for the tense, taut-muscle symmetry of Joan's pose, together with her ecstatically elevated face, finds parallels in the clinical drawings of different stages of hysterical fits drawn by Richer to illustrate Charcot's lectures and his own researches, images that had been published in Richer's *Etudes cliniques sur la Grande Hystérie* in 1881.<sup>20</sup> Alphonse Osbert's *Vision* (ill. 7) was accepted by the Société National des Beaux-Arts in 1892, the year after Séon's painting of Joan of Arc had been rejected. Perhaps this was because Osbert's figure was more natural and pious and not deranged in her pose, but also because the painting was given the generic title *Vision*, so that sensitive issues surrounding the disputed identity of Joan of Arc were not directly brought into play. Séon and Osbert may have preferred suggestive chromatics and flecked surfaces to the carefully observed naturalism of Maurin's painting, but they made their bow to the Salpêtrière in their use of hieratic, quasi-ecstatic postures. All of these artists, in their early thirties, made knowledge of Charcot's *psychologie nouvelle* part of the fabric of their modern paintings. What is significant is that the Salons of the late 1880s and early 1890s had a plenitude of vision subjects. Joan of Arc was central and multi-faceted, painted by an elderly academician like Lenepveu as well as ambitious modernists. Gradually during the later 1880s and early 1890s the languages of *la psychologie nouvelle* – both the visual evidence and the clinical terminology – entered into the ways by which younger painters sought to represent heightened states and younger critics interpreted such images. Art and





6. Alexandre Séon, *Joan of Arc hearing the voices*, 1891. Location, media and dimensions unknown



7. Alphonse Osbert, *Vision*, 1892, oil on canvas, 235 × 138 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

science worked together to make new imagery, new forms of representation, but the rejection of Séon's canvas suggests that this was not without opposition, again adumbrating the ragged, piecemeal absorption of new psychological concepts into the wider public culture.

### Finding form for the formless

Let us take a moment to consider the differences and parallels between a vision and a dream, both, of course, polyvalent words. A dream is a ubiquitous experience. We all sleep, and when asleep we dream. A dream is private to the dreamer; it brings forward images from our unconscious, our deep memories, which play out anxieties, desires and other psychological imperatives. A vision, however, is a quite exceptional experience. A vision does not occur to someone while asleep, but in another state – although by the end of the nineteenth century medical science



was unlikely to admit that the vision was the opening up of another world, but rather the penetration into an inner world of the unconscious. Very few people have visions, and that great rarity provokes questions: is the person insane, ill in some way, or is this person inspired, chosen, saintly? A vision is typically private, experienced by a single person, but not necessarily so; for example in 1847 two shepherds had encountered the weeping Virgin at La Salette near Grenoble.<sup>21</sup> Because a vision is an exceptional experience, and raises questions, knowledge of it soon becomes public. In the public arena the vision becomes subject to interpretation and manipulation; it comes to articulate wider needs or aspirations. Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes may have disappeared into a convent, but her visions created a public cult, a local economy, and a national debate. Joan of Arc was an image at the confluence of mighty modern forces – faith, class, nationalism – over five hundred years after her death.

The common experience of sleep and dreams was important to the symbolist aesthetic, which, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, was concerned to abandon naturalist descriptive modes for poetry, prose and forms of visual representation that were more evocative, suggestive and mysterious. Young, well-educated symbolist artists and writers may have been reacting against naturalism, which saw itself as allied to science in its fact-based procedures, but symbolism too could draw ideas from science, and especially *la psychologie nouvelle* and its exploration of unconscious states. To take a single example from literature, in the experimental novel *Double* (1889) by Francis Poictevin the word *rêve* is a regular leitmotif.<sup>22</sup> Sleep's hermetic world became quite a common motif among young symbolist painters too. Both *In bed* by Edouard Vuillard (1891, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and *Sleeping girl* by Maurice Denis (1892, Musée Bonnat, Bayonne) deal with its



8. Maurice Denis, *La belle au bois dormant*, 1892, oil on canvas, 43 × 53 cm. Private collection

9. Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Georges Rodenbach*, c. 1895, pastel on grey-blue paper, 35 × 54 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

unconscious, private state, each painting employing muted, undisruptive colours and simplified forms to suggest a calm uncluttered by the physical world. Denis produced two other canvases in 1892 featuring the same softly contoured female figure asleep, *Sleeping girl on a black balcony* and the specifically entitled *La belle au bois dormant* (ill. 8). The myth of Sleeping Beauty, in French 'La belle au bois dormant', preoccupied various figures in Parisian symbolist circles. *Poèmes anciens et romanesques* (1890) by Henri de Régnier included three poems on the theme, while Charles Saunier's 'drame féerique' *Les dons funestes* of two years later counterpointed the fairy tale with the tragic life of a peasant family. The Théâtre de l'Œuvre staged *La belle au bois dormant* in 1894, adapted by Henry Bataille and Robert d'Humières, and with sets by Georges Rochegrosse. In 1892 Denis himself designed the décor for *Le songe de la belle au bois* ('The dream of the sleeping beauty'), written by his friend Gabriel Trarieux and staged privately at the house of a Madame Finaly.<sup>23</sup> Denis's three related paintings of sleepers demonstrate his fascination with the theme, as well as the artist's problem of how to represent visually an image of a person engaged with their subconscious and how to depict the images in their mind, their inner visions. In *La belle au bois dormant* Denis could rely on the fairy tale and include the knight riding into the dreamt or fictive narrative, though in all the paintings nuanced chromatics and melting contours were used as pictorial equivalents for the serenity of sleep.

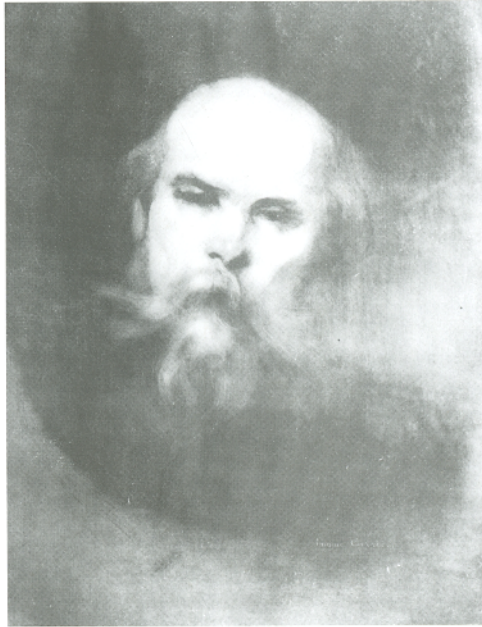
Such formal means also engaged artists who were trying to develop new dimensions for portraiture in response to the findings of *la psychologie nouvelle*.



Medical science's recent discovery of the role of the nervous system in linking the higher and lower faculties, and the new understanding that the conscious was simultaneously engaged with the unconscious parts of the brain, encouraged new modes of portraiture. With the visible and the tactile thus directly linked with the nervous, imaginary and fantastic, novel forms of representation were required. In the pastel portrait of Georges Rodenbach, made by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer about 1895, the writer's body is vague, almost diaphanous, and his eyes seem droopy, semi-focused, even somnambulistic (ill. 9). By contrast, the cityscape of Bruges behind him is exact and solid. Bruges was the staple of Rodenbach's imagination, so the portrait seems to suggest that his imaginative life is more significant than his corporeal. The city appears like a vision, as if it fills the writer's mind, his dreams. When Victor Prouvé painted his friend Emile Gallé in 1892, he showed the glass and furniture designer in the throes of creativity (ill. 10). But his portrait is not merely descriptive. Although Gallé's features, his activity and his craft are all clearly depicted, Prouvé's vividly evident swirls of paint around Gallé's head suggest his patterns of thought and nervous dexterity. In his review of the 1893 Salon National des Beaux-Arts, Roger Marx, friend of both men, read the portrait



10. Victor Prouvé, *Emile Gallé*, 1892,  
oil on canvas, 150 × 98 cm.  
Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, Nancy

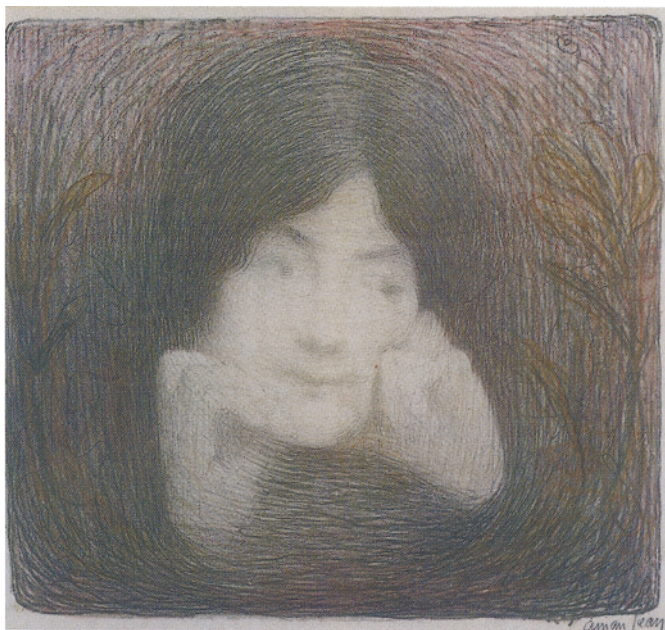


11. Eugène Carrière, *Paul Verlaine*, 1896,  
lithograph, 52.2 × 40.5 cm.  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



of Gallé not only in terms of personality but also of *la psychologie nouvelle*: 'lost in anxious contemplation, he gazes with fixed eye at the vase on whose decoration he meditates nervously, minutely.'<sup>24</sup> Such a conjunction of understanding between artist, sitter and critic was hardly surprising. All three were from Nancy, where Bernheim, Charcot's rival, was also pioneering psychological research, work with which Prouvé, Gallé and Marx were certainly familiar.<sup>25</sup> Similar solutions can be found in other portraits. Take two lithographs, Eugène Carrière's of the poet Paul Verlaine of 1896 (ill. 11) and Edmond Aman-Jean's of the actress Marguerite Moreno of the following year (ill. 12). In both, only the head, site of complex mental activity, is represented. Description of each individual's face has a pictorial equivalence to the use of medium – whether Carrière's veils of tone or Aman-Jean's skeins of colour – as means of suggesting the intellectual or nervous identity of the character. Aman-Jean's incessant line in particular was very effective at suggesting the continuity and complexity of consciousness.

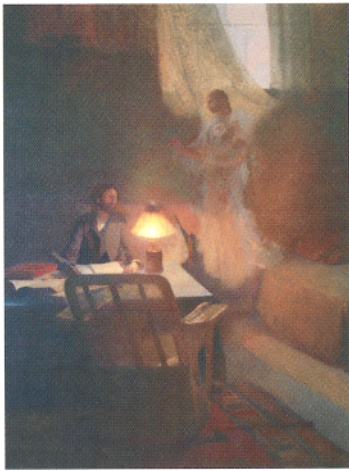
By 1890 *la psychologie nouvelle*, its findings and differences of opinion, were neither novel nor confined to the specialist clinical world. Charcot, for one, was an adept self-publicist who had been giving public lectures about his work since 1878.



12. Edmond Aman-Jean, *Marguerite Moreno*, 1897,  
colour lithograph, 36 × 39.5 cm.  
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

These had been attended not only by republican intellectuals such as those represented in Brouillet's 1887 group portrait, but also by artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme, Jules Dalou and – possibly – Edgar Degas, some of whose brothel monotypes of the later 1870s resemble Richer's drawings of hysterical women.<sup>26</sup> The idea of double consciousness, and of double personality, seeped into public – or at least relatively élite – parlance as a means of understanding character and behaviour. For instance in 1891 Anatole France spoke of Verlaine as having a 'double personality as it were [...] the priest's habit would appear and then the savage would cast it off; [...] by turns believer and atheist, devout and irreligious.'<sup>27</sup> That same year the character Mme. Chantelouve in Huysmans's novel *Là-bas* is described as having 'an outward side that was society lady, prudent and reserved hostess, and another as yet unknown side that was impassioned madwoman, extreme romantic, hysterical of body, nymphomaniac of mind'.<sup>28</sup>

In such a climate of awareness about mental processes it is not surprising that in the 1890s one finds images that are conscious of the process of seeing, imagining, and – literally – envisioning: having a vision of something. Images have always been imagined by their creators, but in the 1890s there was a deliberation about this, and from artists of very different kinds. So how might artists represent



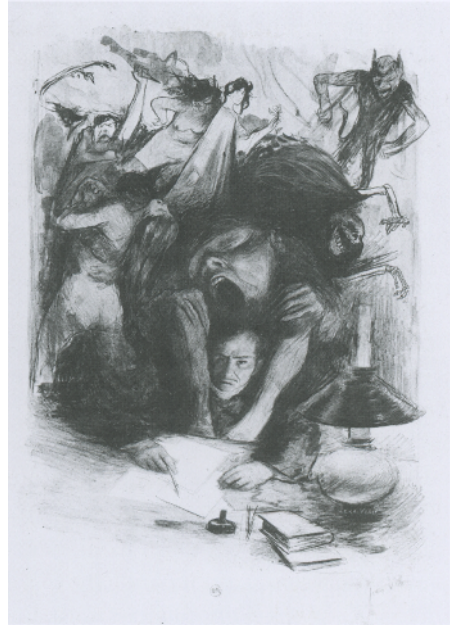
13. Henri Martin,  
*The inspiration of the poet*,  
1885, oil on canvas,  
130 × 97 cm.  
Anderson Galleries,  
Beverly Hills



14. Jean Béraud, *The two muses (Armand Silvestre)*, 1894, oil on panel, 48 × 37 cm.  
Musée des Augustins, Toulouse



15. Albert Maignan, *The green muse*, 1895, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Musée de Picardie, Amiens



16. Jean Veber, *L'ennui*, 1896, lithograph, 26.5 × 19 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

the idea of the vision and link it to modern diagnoses of mental processes and to symptoms of psychological disorder in the modern world? One rather dull way was by the use of the conventional means of representing an apparition. The young Henri Martin did this in his *The inspiration of the poet* (ill. 13), painted in 1885, in which the orthodox notion of the muse is deployed as a sort of intellectual Annunciation. That solution could be caricatured. Armand Silvestre had a bifurcated career: he wrote serious Parnassian poetry and was also a journalist and art critic, in which role he put together *Le nu au Salon*, an annual photographic compilation of nudes to which he added saucy texts. Given that Silvestre's professional life had these two aspects, the artistic and the trivializing, the jocular 1894 portrait of him by Jean Béraud made the most of this, with its two contrasting Muses, the one classical and lyre-playing, the other modern and lipsticked (ill. 14). With *The green muse* (ill. 15) of 1895 Albert Maignan addressed the modern problem of alcoholism and absinthe abuse. Here the man's vision is alcohol-induced, artificially stimulated from the unconscious, his disturbed psychological state clearly distinguished from social – and mental – normality. Finally, the 1896 lithograph by Jean Veber, *L'ennui* (ill. 16), an image of creativity and its difficulties,



depicted nightmare rather than dream. Veber envisaged the tormented writer's unconscious as disturbing, dangerous, his imagery combining traditional motifs – devil, witches, skeleton – with the more modern understanding of psychological imperatives represented by the copulating couple. The very variety of these images – conventional, comic and tormented – indicates the fascination such diverse artists found with trying to find imagery for the new awareness of unconscious processes.

'Brittany, simple superstition and desolation'

Brittany was known as a land of legend and superstition. Breton subjects – whether representing scenes from Breton myth or of Breton piety – were common in the late nineteenth-century Salons. In both cases such subjects shored up notions of difference: difference between the superstitions and piety of backward Brittany and the progressive, scientific character of the metropolitan modernity, between past and present, country and city, Catholicism and republicanism. Such imagery included visions. Fernand Le Quesne's *The legend of Kerdeck* (ill. 17), exhibited at



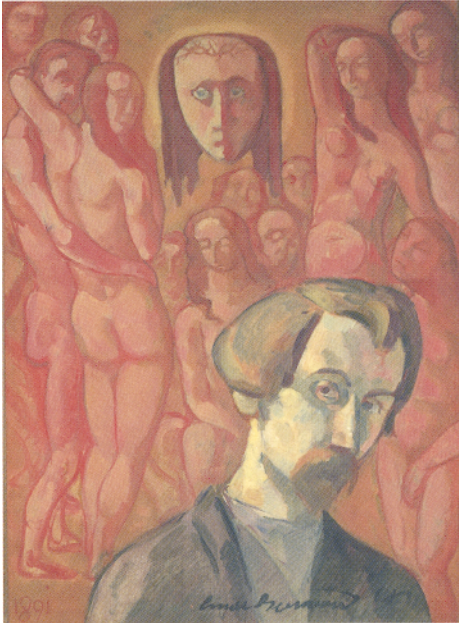
17. Fernand Le Quesne, *The legend of Kerdeck*, 1890, oil on canvas, 210 × 275 cm.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Quimper



the Salon des Artistes Français in 1890, at almost three metres wide and descriptively painted, used scale and detail to give the idea of a vision a palpably physical presence. As the Breton peasant in his regional costume stands pensively on the seashore, naked nymphs sport enticingly before him. However – there is no such thing as the legend of Kerdeck.<sup>29</sup> Le Quesne had invented his ‘legend’, tricking his Parisian public, playing with received notions of Breton culture. In a quest for success at the Salon, the artist relied on clichés which he could manipulate. The subject may represent a vision, but it is superficial both in its exploitation of Breton cultural identity and in its failure to engage with new notions of psychology.

That fascination with trying to find imagery to represent the life of the inner mind can also be traced in the avant-garde work of Gauguin and his Brittany circle. In 1891 Emile Bernard painted a self-portrait known as *Vision. Symbolic portrait* (ill. 18). Bernard’s painting uses essentially the same imagery as Béraud’s *Silvestre* or Veber’s *Ennui*: the image of the tangible person and his intangible mental processes. Bernard’s canvas seems to suggest a struggle in the artist’s mind, or his conscience, between sexuality and faith, with the naked couples in torrid red dominated by the frontal face of the suffering Christ. Bernard himself appears tormented. But although such an image is about the life of the mind, can one really say that it engages with *la psychologie nouvelle*? I suspect not; in notional terms this is about conventional Catholic guilt, and only in pictorial terms is it modern, progressive. In his 1895 novel *En route* Huysmans’s character Durtal has identical visions: ‘Nude figures danced in his brain to the tune of psalms, and he woke from these dreams weak and panting, ready, if a priest had been there, to throw himself at his feet with tears, just as he would have abandoned himself to the basest pleasures, had the temptation suddenly come to him.’<sup>30</sup> But Huysmans was acquainted with Charcot’s work, and the passage about Mme Chantelouve already quoted from his earlier novel *Là-bas* demonstrates Huysmans’s practised use of psychological terminology.

Gauguin himself had recently come up with a similar image. *Nirvana: Portrait of Meijer de Haan* (see p. 36, ill. 5), made in the Breton village of Le Pouldu in 1889–90, does not come across as a conventional portrait.<sup>31</sup> Not only is it crafted in a highly synthetic, quite caricatural style, but De Haan himself stares as if hypnotized, and the two female figures behind him might be taken – in the context of the imagery at which we have been looking – as embodiments of what is envisaged as being on his mind, as figures from a dream, from his unconscious. That said, those figures had already appeared in another work by Gauguin, an 1889 canvas entitled *Life and death* (Khalil Museum, Cairo; W 335). These are philosophical concepts of great importance, but hardly specific to the intimate workings of an individual’s mental processes, hardly uncovered by *la psychologie nouvelle*. It was in late January or early February 1888 that Gauguin had first written, in a letter to his wife Mette, that he had two natures, the sensitive and the savage.<sup>32</sup>



18. Emile Bernard, *Vision*.  
*Symbolic portrait*, 1891,  
 oil on canvas, 81 × 60.3 cm.  
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris; L 298

Although he was later to make much of this dichotomy, at this stage it was little more than a general observation about contradictions in his personality; there was no use of clinical terminology, no sense in his published letters that Gauguin had an articulate grasp of the new understanding of the conscious and the unconscious. Gauguin does not seem to have come into contact with more modern concepts of the inner imaginary or the unconscious until he returned from Brittany – where the image of De Haan had been made – to Paris. Then, in March 1891 *Madame la Mort*, a three-act play by the decadent authoress Rachilde, was performed at the Théâtre d'Art. She described in the company's house journal how in the second act which 'takes place entirely in a dream, in *the brain of a dying man* [...] I have tried to give substance to certain hallucinations, such as the struggle between Life and Death, who are claiming both the body and the mind of the neurotic man.'<sup>33</sup> Like Huysmans, as a writer Rachilde knew how to use the language of *la psychologie nouvelle*. But from his artist's angle Gauguin did not, and the pictorial problem frustrated him. On 5 February 1891 he wrote to Rachilde, who had commissioned a drawing to illustrate the piece: 'When I read your play *Madame la Mort* I was quite dismayed. How can I express your thinking with just a pencil ...'<sup>34</sup> In the event, his solution was similar to Carrière's work, using sweeping fields or veils of tone to suggest the immateriality of the hallucinatory vision (ill. 19) But in this case the artist was by no means as in tune with the psychology's new contributions to intellectual culture as the writer.

The next year Ker-Xavier Roussel produced a small painting called *Vision* (ill. 20) This too was linked to the theatre, in this instance *Les fleurs* by Charles de Lerberghe, performed at the Théâtre d'Art in February 1892. In the play a girl watches over her dying mother, as a sequence of macabre visitors pass. The dying woman has a vision of the Virgin Mary.<sup>35</sup> Roussel's picture evocatively distils the sinister quality of the play, but eschews any attempt descriptively to visualize the apparitions, preferring a single suggestive shadowy figure. Roussel was perhaps more confident than Gauguin about finding a pictorial equivalent to the subtleties and suggestiveness of the symbolist theatre because he was not only younger and better educated, but also Parisian and acquainted through friends such as the actor Aurélien Lugné-Poe with the symbolist theatre and – via that world perhaps – the ideas that could be drawn from the wider literary and even scientific culture.

For his part, Gauguin does not seem to have been acquainted with this rich and insistent current in contemporary intellectual life. In his letters written in Brittany in 1888 and 1889 he used the language typical of accounts of the region. Writing to Vincent van Gogh in late November 1888 about the *Vision of the sermon* Gauguin explained that the painting was characterized by 'a great rustic and



19. Paul Gauguin, *Madame la Mort*, 1891, moistened charcoal on verge paper, 23.5 × 29.8 cm. Musée du Louvre (fonds Orsay), Paris

*superstitious simplicity*'.<sup>36</sup> Almost exactly a year later he described the *Green Christ* (1889, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; W 328) to Theo van Gogh in telegraphic terms, stating that the painting breathed 'Brittany, simple superstition and desolation ... belief passive suffering primitive religious style'.<sup>37</sup> In that letter Gauguin did mention that his recent paintings and sculptures were concerned with suggestion and 'evoked visions', but this parlance was used in general and certainly not clinical terms.<sup>38</sup> Nowhere at this period does one find Gauguin using terminology such as *hallucination*, *névrosé*, or *hystérique*, which writers such as Huysmans and Rachilde found came easily. Gauguin's adoption of the standard parlance about backward Brittany – superstitious, Catholic, unmodernized – is both somewhat dismissive of the region and also grateful that it suits his work. But his language does not take on an explicitly republican tone – anti-clerical, technocratic, reformist – nor does it use the terms of *la psychologie nouvelle* which were adopted by republicans to discredit their clerical opponents. Perhaps Gauguin simply had no grip of these terms, or no interest in them, or considered them too geared to urban existence and thus irrelevant to the rural life which he had chosen as the raw material of his artistic expression. On the other hand, it would not have taken much of a leap in Gauguin's conceptualization to have talked about the Breton peasants' reliance on the lower mental faculties. The fact that he did not, or could not, conceptualize in this way (the medical references in his correspondence at this period typically concern his digestive problems) seems to indicate how fragmented or partial avant-garde attitudes and discourse were at this period. A painter working primarily outside Paris was not necessarily engaged with new ideas current in metropolitan literary circles and derived from modern medical discoveries.

We know that at this period the Third Republic used science, including medicine and *la psychologie nouvelle*, to discredit its political enemy, the Church. These discourses, as part of the fabric of contemporary intellectual and cultural life, can be used in the interpretation of paintings. In Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon*, it could be argued, what the artist presents to us is not a vision, a revelation vouchsafed to the pious, but a representation of a collective pathological state not dissimilar to Moreau de Tours's *Patients in a state of fascination at the Charité hospital*. The peasant women function at the level of their lower faculties – suggestibility, habit, instinct – rather than their higher faculties, such as rationality and intellect. That might be expected in the ill-educated and superstitious, still collectively and individually in thrall to legend and folk belief as well as to the preaching of the *curé*. So, one might go on, Gauguin's *Vision* did not depict peasant piety but condemningly represented the unevolved, psychologically ill-developed Breton people. Such a reading would place Gauguin in a republican position, using science to subvert superstition, promoting progress over ingrained tradition. There is, however, no plausible evidence in Gauguin's correspondence that he thought, or was

20. Ker-Xavier Roussel,  
*Vision*, 1892, oil on canvas,  
 44 × 31 cm.  
 Musée départemental du  
 Prieuré, Saint-Germain-  
 en-Laye



even capable of thinking, in such a way. Unlike Maurin, Séon or Osbert, Gauguin does not seem to have drafted the ideas of *la psychologie nouvelle* into how he envisaged modern painting might be. In this sense, one can draw a parallel between Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* and Zola's *Le rêve*, also crafted in 1888. The painting and the novel both dealt with visions, with experience beyond the rational and material. They were created in a year when research establishing different levels of consciousness was reaching important and lasting conclusions about the functioning of the human mind, and yet neither Gauguin nor Zola, while sharing a fascination with the inner mind, seems yet to have been able – or inclined to choose – to use the language or grasp the concepts of *la psychologie nouvelle*. For in both the *Vision of the sermon* and *Le rêve* a vision is still imagined as something from outside rather than within the mind. Sometimes the most radical art is quite divorced from radical ideas in other areas of life. Different kinds of modernity – and here we have discussed the political, the psychological and the painted – can just pass each other by.

## Envoi: Hysteria and the limits of interpretation

Using as its point of departure the conjunction of vision imagery in the work of Gauguin, Detaille and Zola in 1888, this essay has explored the very various efforts by some contemporary artists to engage their imagery with the current concepts of *la psychologie nouvelle*. It has only been a partial and not an exhaustive survey. It has discussed neither the hallucinatory imagery of Odilon Redon nor Puvis de Chavannes's *Vision antique* exhibited at the Salon of 1886 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon); neither James Tissot's vision of Christ comforting the dispossessed, experienced in the mid-1880s at the church of Saint-Sulpice, nor the painting of it which he exhibited at the 1894 Salon Nationale des Beaux-Arts (State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg); neither the description of visions in Octave Mirbeau's novel *Le calvaire* (1886) or the unconscious 'double' in Maupassant's 'Le horla', the tale to which Vincent van Gogh referred after his breakdown in December 1888. The very fact that these, and many other examples, might have been examined only indicates the extent and diversity of contemporary society's fascination with what I have loosely and embracingly called the visionary. That the determinedly rationalist culture of the Third Republic could engage with such matters appears uncomfortably paradoxical, until one takes into account the Republic's own promotion of science, and – in this context – particularly psychology, as a way of explaining behaviour in the modern world. Nor should one forget, despite the Republic's attempts to diminish it, the continuing influence of the Catholic Church: Gauguin certainly did not. And yet for all the proliferation of notions about suggestibility and hysteria, two levels of consciousness and divided personalities into the fields of visual, literary and journalistic culture, it appears that their infiltration was partial, staccato and phased. Even among artists and writers active in the metropolis such ideas may only have been sensed as part of the ambient culture. Thus the two *Le rêves* of 1888 by Zola and Detaille take on the idea of the vision, but only within the context of the hereditary preoccupations of the *littérateur* and the nationalistic ones of the painter. Neither seems to have been concerned to be *au courant* with the concepts of *la psychologie nouvelle*. Like them, though again quite independently and in an entirely different form of representation, Gauguin too could find himself engaged with the idea of the vision and the inner life. But, as his dialogue with Rachilde shows, he could not articulate the concepts or terms, and found it difficult to find visual forms for visionary mental experience. In both *Vision of the sermon* and *Nirvana* he found he had to rely – as so many of his contemporaries and artists of the past had done – on the device of twinning the visionary and the vision. Finding form for inner experience alone – as Redon attempted – was still a rare initiative.

There is also a historiographical dimension to this essay. It suggests that we should not place too great or uncritical an emphasis on using the hysteria analysis

to understand early Third Republic France, which many history and art history texts have done since the publication of Georges Didi-Huberman's pioneering *Invention de l'hystérie* in 1982.<sup>39</sup> This is not to argue against the significance of *la psychologie nouvelle*, Charcot and Bernheim's researches, or concepts such as neurosis and neurasthenia, all of which had a marked and to some extent determining impact on late nineteenth-century culture and society. But the evidence and examples discussed here suggest a nuanced approach, recognizing that artists and writers have their own preoccupations, slippages and blind spots. They may be unaware of a cultural current or, sensing it, respond in an inarticulate way, or engage with it intently. To explore those nuances it is illuminating to look across the whole contemporary panorama, bringing into play not only imagery and literature, but also politics, science and social trends, the better to analyse how and why cultural phenomena took the shapes they did. In art historical terms, this necessitates exploring diverse range of imagery – looking at Detaille as well as Gauguin, Veber as well as Bernard – to ensure that we do not oversimplify or heroize modernity and the avant-garde.

## NOTES

1. Rae Beth Gordon, *Why the French love Jerry Lewis: From cabaret to early cinema*, Stanford 2001, p. 25.
2. For the most recent study of this painting, see Belinda Thomson, exhib. cat. *Gauguin's vision*, Edinburgh (National Galleries of Scotland) 2005.
3. Nadhine Simon-Dhouailly, exhib. cat. *La leçon de Charcot: Voyage dans une toile*, Paris (Musée de l'Assistance Publique) 1986, p. 21; Marie-Véronique Clin, 'Quelques exemples de sujets médicaux dans la peinture à la fin du XIXe siècle', in exhib. cat. *André Brouillet, 1857-1914*, Poitiers (Musée Sainte-Croix) 2000, pp. 71-73.
4. Simon-Dhouailly, *La leçon de Charcot*, p. 31.
5. Gordon, *Why the French love Jerry Lewis*, p. 32.
6. Georges Lafenestre, 'Les Salons de 1890. 1. La peinture aux Champs-Élysées', *Revue des deux mondes*, ser. 3, 89 (1 June 1890), p. 667; Anon., *Album Gonnon. Iconographie médicale, 1895-1908*, Lyon [c.1908], pp. 163-64.
7. For an important account of Charcot and *la nouvelle psychologie's* influence on aspects of late nineteenth-century French visual culture, see Debora L. Silverman, *Art nouveau in fin-de-siècle France: Politics, psychology and style*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1989.
8. Gordon, *Why the French love Jerry Lewis*, pp. 13, 22, 5.
9. Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and spirit in the secular age*, London 1999, pp. 250, 256.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 334-35.
12. F. W. J. Hemmings, *Emile Zola*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1966, p. 237.
13. In his earlier novel *Pot-bouille* (1882) Zola had used words such as *hystérique*, but only in the most general terms; see Emile Zola, *Pot-bouille*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, ed. H. Mitterand, Paris 1967, pp. 423, 433.
14. Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900*, New Haven and London 2004, pp. 210-13.
15. For Joan of Arc, see *inter alia* Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History*, New Haven & London 1994, pp. 154-65; and exhib. cat. *Jeanne d'Arc: Les tableaux de l'histoire*, Rouen (Musée des



Beaux-Arts) 2003.

16. Philippe de Chennevières, 'Le Salon de 1880. II', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 2, 21 (June 1880), p. 512; Joris-Karl Huysmans, 'Le Salon officiel de 1880', *L'Art moderne*, Paris, 1883 (1919 ed., p. 149.)
17. 'la face hallucinée'. Roger Marx, 'J. Bastien-Lepage', *La Nouvelle Revue* 34, May-June 1885, p. 198; 'extase mystique'. Paul Mantz, 'Exposition Universelle de 1889: La peinture française. Troisième article', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 3, 31 (October 1889), p. 365.
18. 'De l'étude était résultée cette figure, au caractère troublant par son mélange d'héroïsme et de folie; l'héroïsme dans le geste, la folie dans les yeux'; 'profondément moderne'. Arsène Alexandre, 'Notes sur Charles Maurin', *Paris*, 23 July 1888.
19. 'd'une façon absolument nouvelle [...] debout, hypnotisé dans une contraction extrême'; 'Ce spasme des paupières dont la supérieure se cambre au-dessus d'un iris d'étrange cristallinité, ces mains crispées, le pouce en dehors, sont d'une hystérique en extase.' 'découvertes récentes'. Alphonse Germain, 'Sur un tableau refuse: Théorie du symbolisme de teintes', *La Plume*, no. 50 (15 May 1891), pp. 171-72.
20. Paul Richer, *Etudes cliniques sur la Grande Hystérie*, Paris 1881, p. 677; Rodolphe Rapetti, 'From anguish to ecstasy: Symbolism and the study of hysteria', in exhib. cat. *Lost paradise: Symbolist Europe*, Montreal (Museum of Fine Arts) 1995, pp. 231-32.
21. Harris, *Lourdes*, p. 252.
22. Francis Poictevin, *Double*, Paris 1991 [1889], pp. 140-42 169, 178, 180.
23. Catherine Lepdor, 'Sleeping pictures: Sur quelques représentations de la Belle au Bois Dormant au XIXe siècle', in exhib. cat. *Le sommeil, ou quand la raison s'absente*, Lausanne (Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts) 1999-2000, pp. 39-40.
24. 'abimé dans sa réflexion anxieuse, l'œil fixe, il offre à son regard le vase dont il médite le décor nerveusement, longuement.' Roger Marx, *L'est républicain*, 13 May 1893; quoted in Michèle Leinen, 'Chronologie Nancy-Paris, 1881-1904', in exhib. cat. *Peinture et art nouveau*, Nancy (Musée des Beaux-Arts) 1999, p. 141.
25. Silverman, *Art nouveau*, pp. 230-42.
26. Simon-Dhouailly, *La leçon de Charcot*, p. 39. For links between Degas's brothel monotypes

and Charcot, see Richard Thomson, *Degas: The Nudes*, London 1988, p. 102.

27. '[personnalité] double, pour ainsi dire...l'habit noir paraissait, puis le sauvage s'en débarrassait;...tour à tour croyant et athée, orthodoxe et impie'. Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'Evolution Littéraire*, Paris 1999 [1891], p. 58.
28. 'tout un côté visible de femme de monde, de salonnière prudente et réserve, et un autre côté alors inconnu de folle passionnée, de romantique aigue, d'hystérique de corps, de nymphomane d'âme'. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Là-bas*, Paris 1878 [1891], p. 117.
29. Daniel Yonnet and André Cariou, *Le Finistère des peintres*, Rennes 1993, p. 102.
30. 'Toujours des nudités lui dansaient dans la cervelle, au chant des psaumes; et il sortait des ces rêveries, haletant, énérvé, capable, si un prêtre s'était trouvé là, de se jeter en pleurant, à ses pieds, de même qu'il se fût rué aux plus basses ordures si une fille eût été près de lui, dans sa chambre.' Joris-Karl Huysmans, *En route*, ed. Dominique Millet, Paris 1996 [1895], pp.79-80.
31. For this painting see Eric M. Zafran (ed.), exhib. cat. *Gauguin's Nirvana: Painters at Le Pouldu 1889-1890*, Hartford (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art) 2001.
32. Belinda Thomson, 'A Frenchman and a Scot in the South Seas: Paul Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson', *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, 2003, p. 62.
33. 'se passe tout entier dans le rêve, dans le cerveau d'un homme agonisant...j'ai tâché de rendre palpable certaines hallucinations, telle la lutte de la Vie et de la Mort qui se disputent tantôt le corps, tantôt l'esprit du névrosé.' *Théâtre d'Art* 2, March 1891, p. 1; quoted in John A. Henderson, *The first avant-garde (1887-1894): Sources of the modern French theatre*, London 1971, p. 94; Claire Frèches-Thory in exhib. cat. *Gauguin*, Paris (Grand Palais) & Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1988-89, p. 204, gives different dates.
34. 'A la lecture de votre drame Made la Mort j'ai été vraiment perplexe. Comment exprimer votre pensée avec un simple crayon...' Maurice Malingue (ed.), *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, Paris 1946, letter 118, p. 209, 5 February 1891.
35. Henderson, *The first avant-garde*, p. 100.
36. 'une grande simplicité rustique et superstitieuse'. Douglas Cooper (ed.), *Paul*

Gauguin; 45 *Lettres à Vincent, Théo et Jo van Gogh*, Lausanne & The Hague 1983, letter 32, p. 229, c. 22 November 1888.

37. 'Bretagne, superstition simple et désolation...croyance souffrance passive style religieux primitif'. Ibid., letter 22, p. 163, 20 or 21 November 1889.

38. 'visions évoqués'. Ibid., pp. 159, 161, 169.

39. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie: Charcot et l'iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, Paris 1982.



C'est ainsi que, sous le voile de l'amitié, le scélérat vint  
à bout de s'emparer de ma cervelle, dont il fit son profit, car, à mesure que ma tête  
diminuait de volume, la sienne grossissait.....

# **Paths forgotten, calls unheard: Illustration, caricature, comics in the 19th century**

Patricia Mainardi

The nineteenth century was the great age of illustration, producing more illustrated books, magazines and newspapers than all previous centuries put together. And yet, given the necessity of first establishing chronologies and cataloguing the material, art-historical studies of the various kinds of illustration – caricature, popular imagery, comics or book illustration – have lagged behind scholarship in other areas of art history.<sup>1</sup> While basic research forms a necessary foundation for further study, the consideration of artists or genres in isolation has reinforced their dislocation from the larger frame of art history.<sup>2</sup> What I hope to accomplish in this brief essay is to indicate some possibilities for the integration of the study of illustration into that of the graphic arts and art history as a whole. I regard illustration not as the poor relation of the more prestigious art of drawing, but as an important medium in its own right and one that has often freed the artist to

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1. Tony Johannot, 'And so, in the guise of friendship, the rogue stole my brain', *Voyage où il vous plaira*, 1843, opp. p. 109, wood engraving

produce significant and memorable images. The imaginative possibilities and visual strategies developed by nineteenth-century illustrators were often rediscovered later by subsequent generations of artists, and so the study of illustration will not only broaden our conception of nineteenth-century visual culture, but will also cast a new light on later, more familiar, art-historical developments.

By 1900, books illustrated with drawings largely disappeared, surviving mainly as luxury goods or children's literature; as a result, the prevalent conception today is that comic strips and the modern graphic novel are the inevitable outcome of nineteenth-century illustration. There were, however, many other interesting and important contemporaneous developments. I take as my model the thoughts of the novelist Milan Kundera, who wrote: 'I often hear it said that the novel has exhausted all its possibilities. I have the opposite impression: during its 400-year history, the novel has missed many of its possibilities: it has left many great opportunities unexplored, many paths forgotten, calls unheard.'<sup>3</sup> In the course of its development, visual narration has also left many paths forgotten and calls unheard.

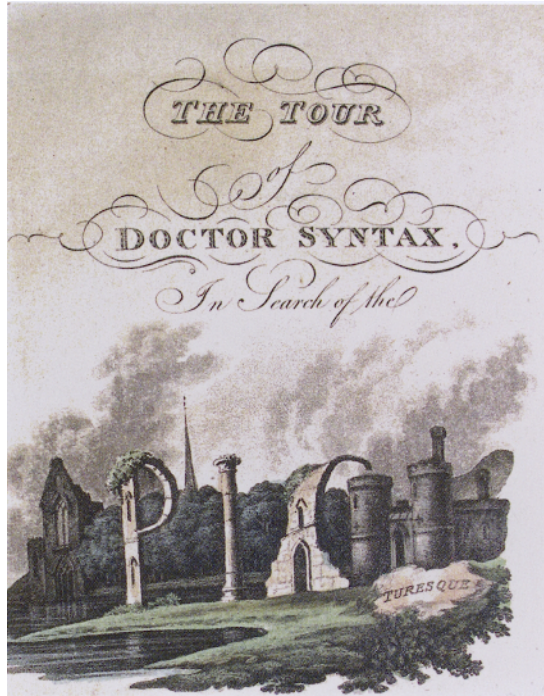
#### The comic strip as illustration

Since comics are the most familiar progeny of nineteenth-century illustration, I begin with the Swiss schoolmaster Rodolphe Töpffer, universally acknowledged as the inventor of the comic strip. His first, *L'histoire de Mr Jabot*, was published in 1833, and he eventually published seven of what he called 'la littérature en estampes' ('picture stories').<sup>4</sup> His 1845 *Histoire de Mr Cryptogame* was translated, published and plagiarized throughout Europe and America, and the Dutch version, *Mr Prikkebeen*, remains a children's classic in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup>

While Töpffer both wrote the text and drew the images for his comic albums, it was more common for nineteenth-century artists to collaborate with writers rather than to produce an entire book alone. Often collaborative works are judged somewhat inferior by art historians because the artist's images illustrate someone else's text. Nonetheless, the provision of a text might well be liberating and might allow artists a greater degree of creative freedom. It might even result in a different medium altogether. By exploring nineteenth-century varieties of word/image collaboration, we will better understand the richness of its visual culture, much of which is unfamiliar to us today.

Probably the best known example is the 1812 English publication, *The tour of Doctor Syntax, in search of the picturesque: A poem*, with images by Thomas Rowlandson and text by William Combe (ill. 2). *Doctor Syntax* is usually cited as the first major step towards the invention of comics because its ongoing character, Doctor Syntax, was subsequently sent by the artist and writer on two additional

2. Thomas Rowlandson,  
Cover for *The tour of  
Doctor Syntax, in search of  
the picturesque*, 1812,  
hand-coloured engraving



tours, *The second tour of Dr. Syntax, in search of consolation* (1820) and *The third tour of Dr. Syntax, in search of a wife* (1821). Doctor Syntax's tour was first serialized by Rudolph Ackermann in his *Poetical Magazine* from May 1809 to May 1811 under the title 'The schoolmaster's tour', after which Ackermann republished the completed work in book form; it was such a success that it sold out five editions in twelve months.<sup>6</sup> The clergyman's adventures became widely known throughout Europe and America, spawning imitations and plagiarisms throughout the century. In Combe's own account of his collaboration with Rowlandson, he stated that each month he received from the artist a coloured sketch, around which he composed the chapter, 'the Artist and the Writer having no personal communication with, or knowledge of each other'.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the sheer brilliance of Rowlandson's images and general hilarity of Combe's text, what is most significant is that Rowlandson created his images before William Combe wrote the text, in other words, the writer illustrated the artist, the reverse of what we today think is the normal order of precedence. Rowlandson's innovation was repeated often enough in subsequent decades that there is a nineteenth-century subgenre of works conceived by artists and illustrated by writers.

The innovation of *Doctor Syntax*, that is the precedence of the artist over the writer, is offset by its traditional organization, in which a full-page hand-coloured

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PAUL.



« Je dis à Paul : « Mon ami , vo-  
« tre sœur restera. Demain  
« nous en parlerons au gou-  
« verneur ; laissez reposer vo-  
« tre famille , et venez passer  
« cette nuit chez moi. Il est tard ; il est minuit ; la  
« croix du sud est droite sur l'horizon . »



« I se laissa emmener sans rien  
« dire , et , après une nuit fort agi-  
« tée , il se leva au point du jour ,  
« et s'en retourna à son habitation . »





ET VIRGINIE.

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ais qu'est-il besoin de vous  
continuer plus long-temps le  
récit de cette histoire ? Il n'y a  
jamais qu'un côté agréable à  
connaître dans la vie humaine.

Semblable au globe sur lequel nous tournons,  
notre révolution rapide n'est que d'un jour, et  
une partie de ce jour ne peut recevoir la lumière,  
que l'autre ne soit livrée aux ténèbres



on père, lui dis-je, je vous en  
« conjure, achevez de me racon-  
« ter ce que vous avez commence  
« d'une manière si touchante.  
« Les images du bonheur nous plaisent, mais  
« celles du malheur nous instruisent. Que devint,  
« je vous prie, l'infortuné Paul? »

3. Tony Johannot and François-Louis Français, Illustrations for  
Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (1788), Curmer edition,  
1838, wood engravings, pp. 136-37



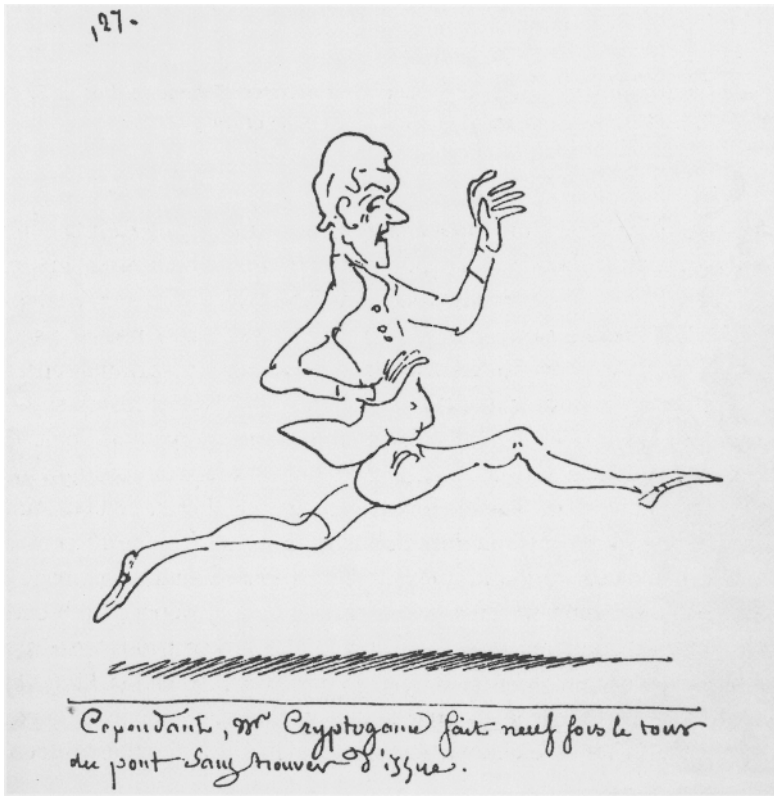
4. Thomas Rowlandson, 'Doctor Syntax tumbling into the Water', *The tour of Doctor Syntax, in search of the picturesque*, 1812, canto IX, hand-coloured engraving

engraving by Rowlandson accompanies each canto (chapter) by Combe. In this sense, *Dr. Syntax* is typical of traditional book illustration, which rarely had more than one illustration per chapter and often fewer. The primary reason for this was technological. Because the same reproductive processes could not be used for both word and image, text was printed in letterpress with images printed separately in etching or engraving. Both text and images were then bound together, as was the case with *Dr. Syntax*. As a result, illustrations were sparse and books were costly. Later in the nineteenth century, technological advances brought books more into an economic range feasible for an increasingly literate public, and two new media encouraged the proliferation of illustrations: the development of wood engraving, which allowed word and image to be combined on a single page, and the invention of lithography, which allowed images to be produced both cheaply and quickly. Comics, illustrated novels and periodicals utilized both these media. The result was a great age of illustrated publications of all types, peaking first in France in the 1840s, and later throughout Europe and America. It is no coincidence that both comic books and illustrated books of all kinds had their golden age during this same period.

Mass-produced illustrated books were, at first, quite similar to earlier publications. *Dr. Syntax*, for example, has only twenty-nine illustrations (plus the cover

and frontispiece) in twenty-six cantos, essentially one illustration per chapter. When illustrations proved a major commercial attraction, however, publishers began increasing their numbers and using that as a point of advertisement. The 1838 Curmer edition of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788) advertised thirty full-page illustrations and four hundred vignettes, smaller images inserted within the text (ill. 3). This feature delighted readers, although it was condemned by literary critics and by writers who resented having to share the reader's attention with artists.

The increase in the number of illustrations was not only quantitative, however; it affected the conceptual organization of the artist's task, which, in turn, changed the way the reader/viewer experienced the work. The earlier practice of book illustration had much in common with history painting, where the artist chose to depict a moment that in some way presented the crux of the situation - a moment of high drama, a crossroads of action, a moment of intellectual decision. Until the modern period, most of the painting of the Western world, or at least its most



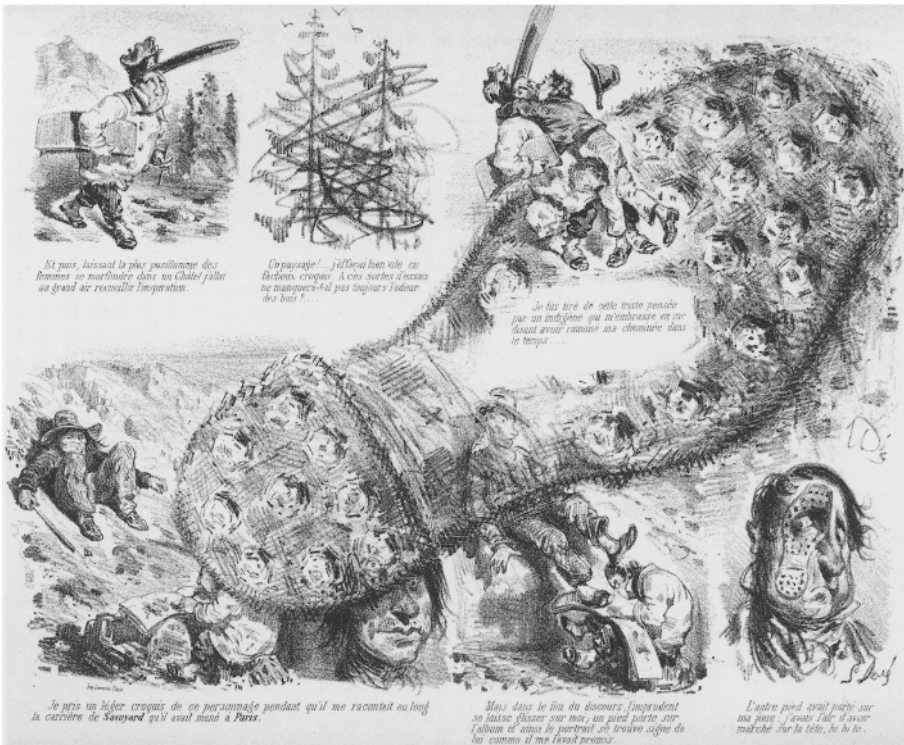
5. Rodolphe Töpffer, *Histoire de Mr Cryptogame*, 1845, no. 127, wood engraving



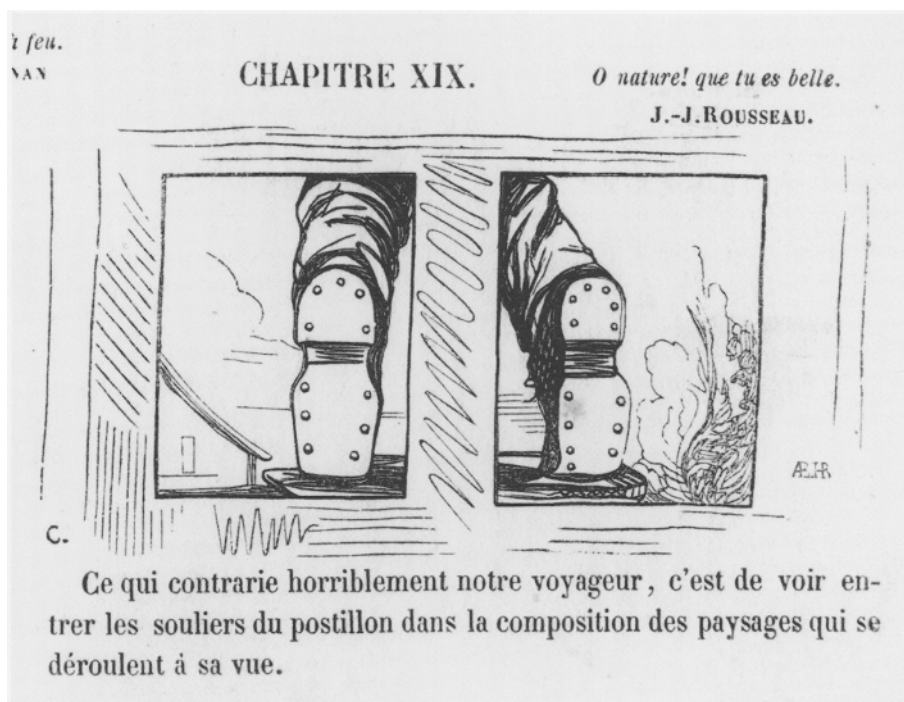
6. Gustave Doré, *Les travaux d'Hercule*, 1847, no. 36, lithograph

prestigious category of history painting, was basically illustrative of some text, whether biblical, mythological or historical. And so, early illustrated comic books such as *Dr. Syntax* adopted a narrative strategy not so very different from that of a painter like Peter Paul Rubens, whose narrative cycle of twenty-four paintings of the life of Marie des Médicis, completed in 1625 and now in the Louvre, depicted the high points of her career, just as Rowlandson depicted the major events in *Dr. Syntax's* tour (ill. 4). But – and here is the crux of the nineteenth-century transformation – what would happen to the concept of narration if, instead of twenty-four images, Rubens – or Rowlandson – had to produce several hundred? If we look to the work of Töpffer to answer that question, we will find a narrative strategy

that has become so familiar to us in both comic books and cinema that it seems transparently 'natural.' Since Töpffer told his stories entirely through images, with minimal text, his frames are figure-centered like a film storyboard, and move the narrative along rapidly, based on actions and events. The French comic artists who followed Töpffer made many formal innovations and expanded his semiotic vocabulary into the formal language familiar to us today in comics. Töpffer's moving figures seem immobile, frozen in space (ill. 5), but the young Gustave Doré, in his *Travaux d'Hercule* (1847) invented speed-lines to indicate velocity (ill. 6).<sup>8</sup> Doré also drew out-of-scale objects, such as an enormous foot stepping on the drawing (ill. 7) and interrupting the Renaissance perspective that had governed all art and illustration, even comic-books, until then. In his *Impressions de voyage de Monsieur Boniface* (1844), the caricaturist Cham (Charles-Henri-Amédée de Noé) depicted scenes in close-up, from the point-of-view of a character (ill. 8) not that of the reader, a visual trope that did not enter film until the close-up camera



7. Gustave Doré, *Dés-agréments d'un voyage d'agrément* (*[Dis]-pleasures of a pleasure trip*), 1851, no. 10, lithograph



view was invented in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> These are all important formal developments in drawing that have not yet been recognized as the contribution of comics to graphic art. But there were, in addition, other visual narrative strategies that played no role in early comics but were invented instead by illustrators of mid-century novels, and these new inventions also lead to differences in our experience of the work.

Jean Gigoux, a painter as well as a major nineteenth-century illustrator, in his autobiographical collection of essays about his contemporaries recounted how, in 1835, he was approached by the publisher Jacques-Julien Dubochet, who wanted to bring out a new edition of Alain-René Lesage's classic novel, *L'histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715-35):

One day I was asked to do a hundred vignettes for a new edition of this marvelous book. I swear I nearly had an attack of terror. It seemed to me that I would never find a hundred subjects to illustrate. Nonetheless, I did it. Some days later, the publishers asked me to do three hundred more. Then I had to reread the book and to draw more illustrations as I went along. The following week, the publishers, recognizing the pleasure that these vignettes gave to subscribers, asked me for two hundred additional drawings. In all I made six hundred, and I think that I would have been able to continue indefinitely.<sup>10</sup>

8. Cham, 'What horribly annoyed our traveller was to see the boots of the coachman interrupting the landscape that unfolded before him', *Impressions de voyage de Monsieur Boniface*, 1844, p. 8, wood engraving



9. Rodolphe Töpffer, *Histoire d'Albert*, 1845, no. 13, lithograph

Clearly the experience resulted in a conceptual shift in Gigoux's attitude towards illustration, from the time when he fears that he 'would never find a hundred subjects to illustrate' – and here he was clearly thinking of illustration in the traditional sense of depicting major events in the text – to when, after six hundred, he feels that he 'would have been able to continue indefinitely'. The importance of this shift should not be underestimated, because, in the process, Gigoux re-conceptualized his previous practice of visual narration. Instead of choosing a single image to represent a book, or a chapter of a book, or even an event in a chapter of a book, as Rowlandson and earlier illustrators had done, Gigoux established a parallel narrative in which the story unfolds through both words and images. One might think that Töpffer had already done that by 1835, but there are interesting differences that can be seen as paradigmatic of paths forgotten. Although Töpffer's



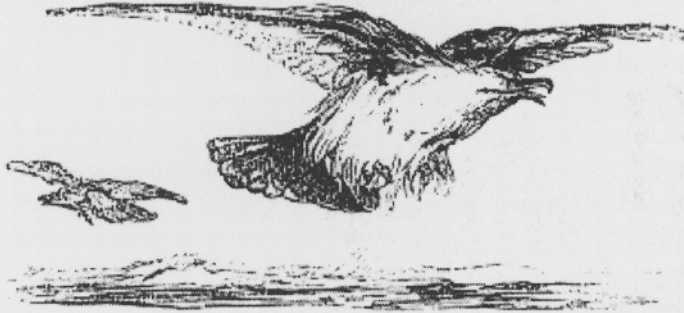


10. Jean Gigoux, 'Capitaine Rolando', for Alain-René Lesage, *L'histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715-35), Paulin edition, 1835, p. 35, wood engraving

11. Jean Gigoux, 'We were like two birds of prey', for Alain-René Lesage, *L'histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715-35), Paulin edition, 1835, p. 394, wood engraving

drawing style was caricature, his stories are told in a straightforward illustrational manner with a minimum of text accompanying each image. His images lead the narrative, and that narrative unfolds through the figures. Gigoux, and all the artists who provided hundreds of illustrations for these mid-century novels, told their stories with a much greater variety of narrative strategies. One possible explanation is that, since the text was bearing the major burden of the narrative, the illustrator could respond with flights of imagination, using the writer's words as a point of departure. But also, the chameleon-like nature of illustration, which the artist adapts to the task at hand instead of presenting in his own signature style (which Töpffer always did), might also have encouraged a variety of means. And so, instead of focusing on the limitations entailed by the artist's working with a writer's text, the negative aspect of the collaboration, it might be more valuable to understand what advantages an artist might derive from this process.

Nous nous arrêtâmes dans une hôtellerie du faubourg, où mon camarade tira de son bissac un habit dont il ne fut pas si tôt revêtu, que nous allâmes faire un tour dans la ville pour reconnoître le terrain, et voir s'il ne s'offriroit point quelque occasion de travailler. Nous considérions fort attentivement tous les objets qui se présentoient à nos regards. Nous ressemblions, comme auroit dit Homère, à deux milans qui cherchent des yeux dans la campagne des oiseaux



dont ils puissent faire leur proie. Nous attendions enfin que le hasard nous fournît quelque sujet d'employer notre industrie, lorsque nous

The great print historian Henri Béraldi called the 1835 edition of *Gil Blas* 'one of the five or six principal illustrated books of the nineteenth century', because it was the first to bring wood engraving into common use, enabling numerous illustrations at a price cheaper than etching or metal-plate engraving.<sup>17</sup> Many of Gigoux's images are typical of book illustration, although uncommon in Töpffer's new medium of comic books: portraiture of the main characters, for example, is something that Töpffer's drawing style, more like caricature than illustration, scarcely allowed. The drawing style of caricature inevitably distances the viewer from the image, like an editorial comment, and prompts the response of ridicule – and indeed, in Töpffer's *Histoire d'Albert* (1845), the protagonist Albert (ill. 9) is very much an object of ridicule. Illustrational images offer a wider latitude for the reader's response: we laugh at Töpffer's Albert, but Gigoux's Capitaine Rolando in *Gil Blas* (ill. 10) inspires fear or admiration, even curiosity about his dress and

weapons, which Gigoux attentively depicts. Illustrators can also present pictorial allusions that would be disruptive in a comic album. For example, when, in *Gil Blas*, Don Raphael says 'we resembled, as Homer would have said, two birds of prey,' the reader immediately *sees* the birds of prey soaring off the page (ill. 11).<sup>12</sup> When Gil Blas arrives at Granada, we see the city at the same time as he does. Neither Töpffer nor later comic-book artists ever bothered to depict a landscape other than as a schematic setting for their comic narratives, but with illustration we can linger over the images, much as a real tourist would, or as an armchair-tourist looking at travel imagery, which was everywhere in the nineteenth century. We do not just read the text, we re-enact it by looking at the illustrations simultaneously through our own eyes and through those of the fictional characters. What is interesting here is the variety of visual experiences that Gigoux provides and the various moods his images evoke: when Gil Blas, having converted to Islam, visits a mosque in Algiers, its shadowy presence casts its spell on the reader far in excess of a simple indication of locale.<sup>13</sup> Later, on three successive pages, we follow the fate of Gil Blas, where first his carriage is stopped at night and he is arrested, then we see a distant view of his prison high on a cliff in Segovia, and, finally, we see him in his miserable cell.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the amusing images of Töpffer, Gigoux's, like all illustrational images, offer a much broader spectrum of emotional impact in which we are caught up in the events they depict, share them, and even, in our reading and looking, re-enact them.

### Illustration as literary decadence

The illustrator's art was not appreciated universally, however. Writers often complained bitterly about the growing fashion for illustrated books; many authors refused to allow their works to be illustrated, and traditional-minded literary critics loathed the new fashion for illustration. Opposition grew until, in 1843, the literary critic Henri Blaze de Bury, writing under his pseudonym of F. de Lagenevais, published a twenty-six page jeremiad in the venerable conservative monthly *Revue des deux mondes* attacking illustrated literature of all kinds.<sup>15</sup> His article can be seen as paradigmatic of this oppositional point of view, since it appeared at the height of production of illustrated literature and in the most respected French periodical. In it he identified and pilloried all the transformations that had been taking place, none of which met with his approval. 'Illustration is a symptom of literary decadence,' he charged, and listed all the reasons for this.<sup>16</sup> Sounding very much like an early Clement Greenberg, he pronounced that 'Each art has its own specific kind of beauty.'<sup>17</sup> He saw the combination of word and image as the worst kind of miscegenation, a bastardization of the high aspirations of both media, each of which, he felt, should compete only in its own sphere. The new technology of

wood engraving that allowed vignettes to be inserted directly into the text (as in ill. 3) instead of being segregated on separate pages was, for him, reprehensible, for while the earlier practice of inserting full-page metal-plate engravings between pages 'did not break the unity of impression so necessary for reading', wood-engraved vignettes 'throw the pages into disorder, upset the regular harmony of lines to which the eye is accustomed', and – the ultimate transgression – 'substitute the draughtsman's vision for that of the poet.'<sup>18</sup> What followed was an itemized denunciation of all the major illustrated works of his period, beginning with illustrated novels and ending with illustrated periodicals. 'La littérature pittoresque' he called it, a pejorative play on the numerous publications that included the word 'picturesque' in their titles.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the Picturesque, the lowly third realm of art that lagged far behind the Beautiful and the Sublime in traditional aesthetic theory, had been for decades under attack by high-minded critics. For Lagenevais, the current prominence of lithography in particular seemed to be symptomatic of the appeal of the picturesque to the lower classes.<sup>20</sup>

Lagenevais's most acerbic criticism, however, was reserved for the 1838 Curmer edition of *Paul et Virginie*, now recognized as the most extraordinary illustrated book of the nineteenth century. Béraldi called it 'one of the most remarkable ever published.'<sup>21</sup> The most profusely illustrated book published up until then, it boasted 450 vignettes, 29 full-page plates and 7 steel-engraved portraits. The leading illustrators of the period – Tony Johannot, François-Louis Français, Eugène Isabey, Paul Huet and Ernest Meissonier – all contributed works, resulting in a tour-de-force of the art of illustration. Nonetheless, according to Lagenevais, illustrated books addressed themselves only to women, children and the barely literate, who leafed through their pages looking at the pictures instead of actually reading them – as did the male audience for serious literature and, to be sure, periodicals such as *Revue des deux mondes*.<sup>22</sup>

For Lagenevais, the only publications worse than illustrated books were the illustrated periodicals newly established in France, with titles such as *Le Charivari* (1832), *Le Magasin pittoresque* (1835), and, more recently, *L'Illustration* (1843). It was England that he and other conservatives blamed for the wave of illustration that they feared was inundating serious literature in France: 'Just like wood engraving and mechanical engraving, like all innovations that tend to seduce the purchaser through cheap price, illustrated journals were born in England, the natural homeland of all commercial ideas.'<sup>23</sup> *The Illustrated London News* had begun publishing less than a year earlier, in May 1842, and *L'Illustration* published its first issue just after Lagenevais's diatribe appeared.<sup>24</sup>

The 1830s and 1840s had seen an explosion of illustrated publications of all kinds, and Lagenevais cited those he found particularly objectionable: albums, travel books, anthologies, landscape views, caricatures, physiologies, almanacs.<sup>25</sup> The ten-volume Curmer edition of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-42) led

the list.<sup>26</sup> A compilation of images of and essays on contemporary social types produced by the period's most prominent illustrators, including Gavarni, Grandville and Daumier, alongside writers such as Balzac, Gautier and Dumas, this publication was so successful that it was reissued in numerous editions throughout the century. Following close behind both in popularity and in Lagenevais's wrath was *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux: Etudes de mœurs contemporains* (1842), a two-volume anthology with images by Grandville and text by popular authors such as Balzac, Nodier and George Sand.<sup>27</sup> These works had been inspired by *Heads of the people* (1838-40), an English publication with illustrations by Kenny Meadows and text by Douglas Jerrold and William Thackeray, among others, that humorously described and illustrated various social types.<sup>28</sup> Quickly translated into French, *Heads of the people* inspired *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* and hundreds of similar 'physiologies', as they were called, small inexpensive books combining text and image that each focused on a particular social type.<sup>29</sup> The student, the society woman, the bourgeois, each was described in a satirical pseudo-sociological style and illustrated in caricature. The illustrators Lagenevais singled out for especially harsh criticism – Tony Johannot, Gavarni, Grandville – were precisely those who were the most celebrated at the time and who contributed most actively to all the contemporary forms of illustrated literature.

While some forms of ephemeral literature, such as albums and almanacs, had been popular in France since the eighteenth century, as had travel literature, landscapes and views, the new technologies of lithography and wood engraving now brought all these into an economic range affordable to a vast middle and artisanal class audience, rather than being limited to the elite audiences of the previous century.<sup>30</sup> As a result, their numbers burgeoned. The major compendium of topographical images, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, begun in 1820, was so successful that, by 1878, over twenty volumes had been published, marshalling several generations of writers and artists to describe, in both word and image, all the regions of France.<sup>31</sup> In addition to these focused publications, there were literary potpourris assembled by publishers that featured the combined efforts of artists and writers. Modelled on the English gift-books known as 'keepsakes', which combined short texts and poems with illustrations, these had become a popular New Year's gift in France.<sup>32</sup>

Among literary figures, Lagenevais singled out Balzac (he called him 'the ubiquitous Balzac') for disapproval for having collaborated with illustrators.<sup>33</sup> The Furne illustrated edition of Balzac's *Comédie humaine* had just begun to appear in the previous year, 1842, and would grow to seventeen volumes by 1848.<sup>34</sup> Balzac had always been interested in illustration and, unlike the authors whom Lagenevais preferred, had actually wanted his novels published in illustrated editions. A regular contributor to the very periodicals and anthologies Lagenevais condemned, Balzac had even served as editor of the satirical journal *La Caricature* in its early years.<sup>35</sup>

It was deplorable enough when artists usurped the author's prerogative by superimposing their own conception of events over those of the writer or even the reader, but Lagenevais saw Armageddon arriving when illustrators 'no longer wanted to translate the text, but to dictate it.'<sup>36</sup> For him, this was truly the world upside-down, where writers were subservient to artists. It was the very innovation introduced by *Doctor Syntax*.

The artist-driven illustrated text that Lagenevais feared would completely destroy literature was especially prevalent in France in the 1840s. By then not only were Töpffer's comic books available (the first plagiarized French editions had appeared in 1839), but the publishing house of Aubert, where Charles Philippon was the guiding force, had brought out eight original new comic books by French authors.<sup>37</sup> We can take these comic books as one aspect of the word/image continuum, certainly the predominant one that survived into the twentieth century, when illustrated novels had declined in numbers and illustrated periodicals had moved on to photography. But for an understanding of the richness and variety of artist-driven publications, there are examples other than comic books that should be cited. The two pre-eminent ones of the nineteenth century are Tony Johannot's *Voyage où il vous plaira* (1843), and Grandville's *Un autre monde* (1844).<sup>38</sup> Both artists enjoyed large audiences for their work, and, logically enough, both were singled out for condemnation by Lagenevais.

*Voyage où il vous plaira*: 'A work of fantasy' by Tony Johannot

Tony Johannot, whom Théophile Gautier called 'the king of illustration', was one of the most prolific illustrators of the nineteenth century, surpassed only later by Gustave Doré.<sup>39</sup> Johannot was credited in the epilogue of *Voyage où il vous plaira* as the book's guiding force and even received precedence on its title page over his collaborators, the well-known writer Alfred de Musset and P.-J. Stahl, the pseudonym of the book's publisher Jules Hetzel.<sup>40</sup> The prospectus used for publicity to generate subscriptions described their working method and forewarned subscribers of the unusual nature of the instalments they would be receiving:

The *Voyage où il vous plaira* being essentially and by its very nature a work of fantasy, complete freedom is given to the authors and to the illustrator. Their project is to write and draw *alternately* according to whether it would be better to write or to draw and whether the pen or the pencil would be more appropriate to render their intentions. Since there will be a considerable number of vignettes relative to the length of the text, subscribers will receive sometimes both text and vignettes, sometimes only vignettes.<sup>41</sup>

And indeed, the book's own subtitle announces that the work 'was written with pen and pencil'.

While Johannot's work has received virtually no attention either from literary critics or from art historians, in many ways it is the most adventurous of the word/image texts of the nineteenth century. Its illustrations are drawn in a variety of styles, ranging from topographic to fantastic (ill. 1), even surrealist. What set it apart from other artist-inspired projects, however, was Johannot's departure from traditional strategies of illustration, and even from Töpffer's picture stories, five of which had been published by 1842, when Johannot began work on his project.<sup>42</sup> The book's conception provided more of a relay than previous collaborative projects, for here the artist and writers actually took turns advancing the plot, as its advance publicity had promised. Most innovative was the insertion of several pages of illustration as a series instead of as single pages. In this way, Johannot repeatedly took over to tell the story himself, interrupting the literary narrative in order to present a visual experience unfolding in real time. These visual interludes break into the literary experience of the text and replace it with another order of experience altogether, akin to the differences between reading a book and watching a film. For example, when the narrator Franz describes how he was obliged to flee for his life on a wild horse, at the line 'Our horses ran like the wind,' Johannot has inserted a vignette depicting the horses and riders, a standard illustrational strategy.<sup>43</sup> But then the narration continues: 'To leave the city, we had to pass in front of my fiancée's house. Her bedroom window was half open and I saw the sweet girl seated before a harpsichord that her uncle, the organist, had left her. She was singing.'<sup>44</sup> This ends the verso page with a colon, which introduces the five-page spread that follows. The full-page recto illustration that immediately follows the colon changes the medium, as well as the reader's focus, from word to image, from Franz to Marie (ill. 12). The vignette of the riders is still visible through the window, but is now much diminished, like a cinematic 'fade out' in the background relative to the foreground sight of Marie singing. The caption presents a synopsis of the preceding text: 'Her bedroom window was half open and she was singing.'<sup>45</sup> Only now we actually *see* her singing. This page is the hinge between word and image. A turn of the page changes the medium again, showing an imaginary Marie in the dark hostile night and presenting us with the words of the song she sings, Mozart's melancholy love song 'Vergiss mein nicht,' rendered into French as 'Rappelle-toi' ('Remember me'), about a departed lover begging his love not to forget him when he is dead and buried. Here the artist is illustrating the text with text, a tour-de-force in using words to illustrate words. Then follows a triple-page spread showing the actual sheet music of the song Marie is singing and playing. Johannot has now illustrated the text with music, so we have gone from reading that Marie is singing, to seeing Marie singing, to reading the words she sings, to actually seeing the sheet music that

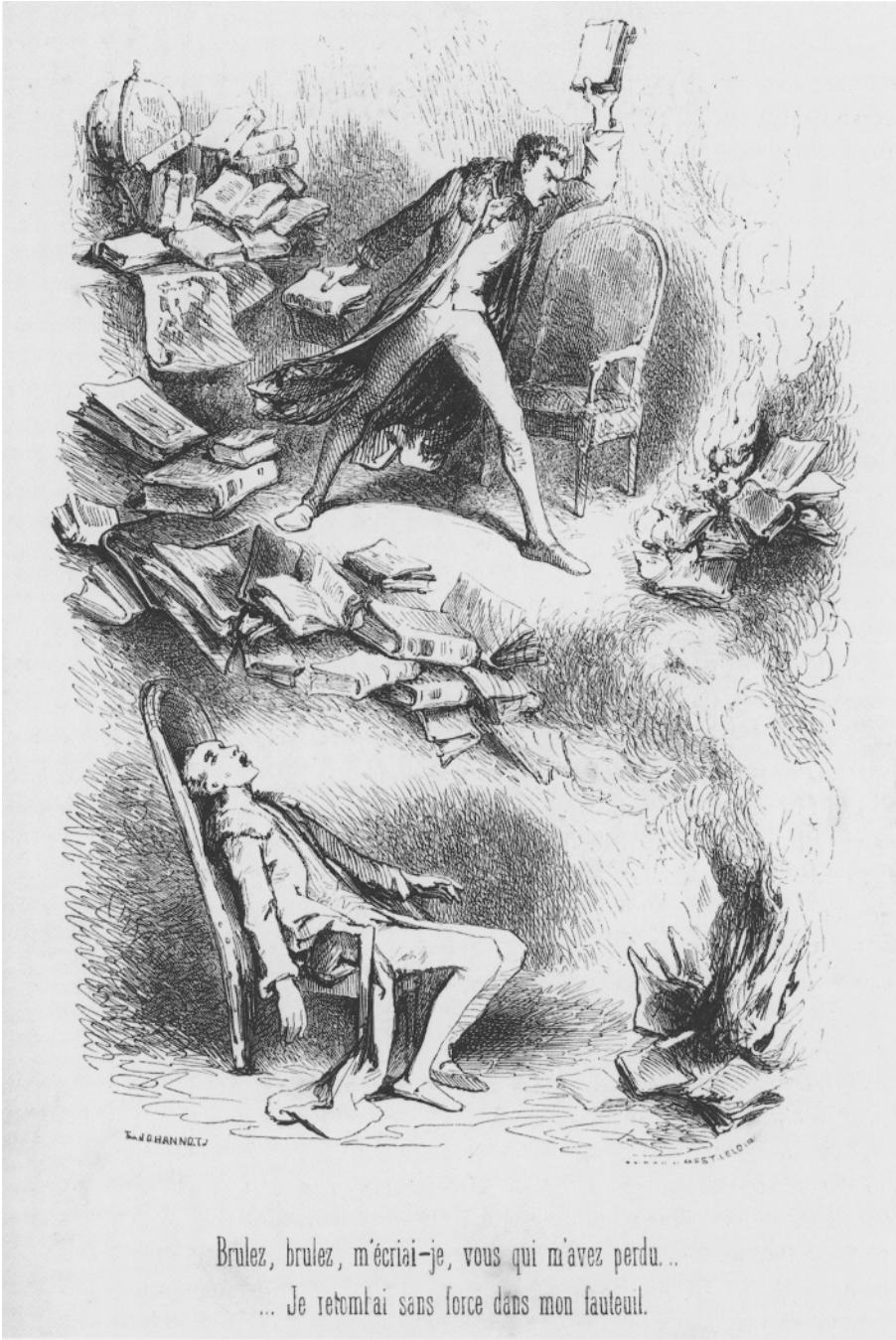




12. Tony Johannot, 'Her bedroom window was half open, and she was singing',  
*Voyage où il vous plaira*, 1843, opp. p. 32, wood engraving

she is playing and singing. The section ends with a final vignette of the young woman silently mourning over her lover's grave. This interlude concludes on a verso page, with the following recto returning us to the text, its first line echoing the last text page: 'She was singing... and I was leaving!'<sup>46</sup> Like a fade-out in film, the vision and the music vanish, to be replaced by the printed words alone. This interlude seems to unfold in real time as the reader turns the pages, with the music actually present, not simply described, nor even simply illustrated by an image of Marie singing. While Johannot's inventiveness has some precedents in earlier works, he was the first to include a sequential series of illustrations that break into the text and usurp its story-telling function. The innovative aspect of this narrative device would have been all the more striking to readers since subscribers received their instalments at intervals and thus, on receiving this one, were forced to wait at least another week before returning to the text. We can well understand the distress that many writers felt in the face of this kind of competition from artists.

A further example of Johannot's inventiveness occurs when Franz is distraught that his beloved Marie is weeping, and so, to distract himself, he opens the book *Voyages autour du monde par le capitaine Cook*, a popular publication of which there were many French editions.<sup>47</sup> The subsequent pages show the illustrations Franz was looking at – or was he imagining them? Cook and his explorers traverse mountains, deserts, and seas. 'I see only ships crossing immense oceans, horses and carriages lumbering towards all corners of the world...', one illustration shows us; another depicts '...only brave and hardy travellers who cross the burning sands of deserts and who climb the rugged peaks of the Alps and the Cordillera.'<sup>48</sup> The instructions to the binder specify that these two pages of plates should follow each other but precede the corresponding passage in the novel, with the result that the reader encounters first images and only later the text that 'illustrates' them.<sup>49</sup> This strategy, situating the writer as illustrator of the artist's images, is repeated throughout the novel, with the artist 'upstaging' the writer, presenting situations and dialogue before they occur in the text. In many of these illustrations, Johannot has adapted for his purposes the *macédoine* or medley print, a type of composite image made up of several views. It had its debut in the eighteenth century in literary anthologies that included snippets from different sources, like the fruit salad that gave it its name. The principle of the *macédoine* was then translated into the new medium of lithography in the 1820s by artists who combined several images on a single sheet.<sup>50</sup> These lithographs quickly became a staple of the print trade, their images often being cut apart and pasted into albums or used as decals for decoration. Here Johannot extends the *macédoine's* reach into illustrated books, where, as in ill. 13, a page of illustration contains a sequence of images often both united and separated by a related motif, such as the whirlwind of books being thrown into the fire.



13. Tony Johannot, 'Burn, burn, I cried', *Voyage où il vous plaira*, 1843, opp. p. 20, wood engraving

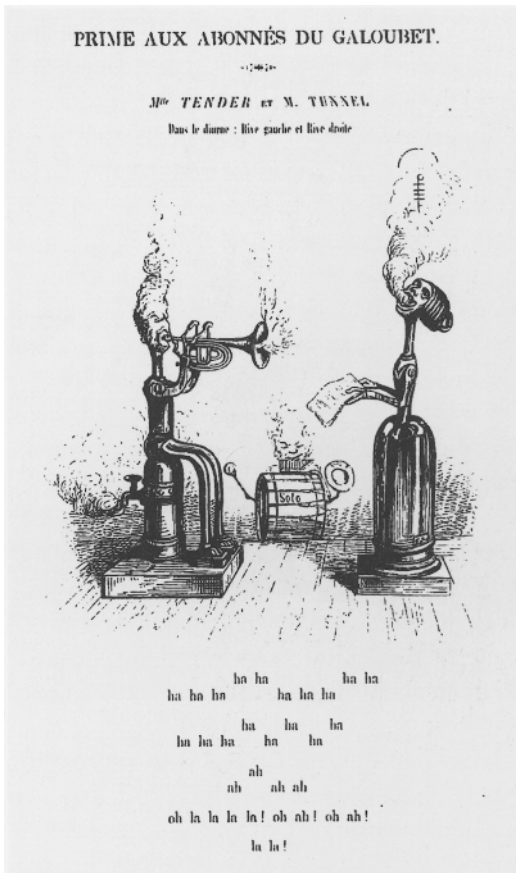
In looking for precedents for these imaginative kinds of literary illustration, the example most often cited is that of the English author Laurence Sterne, whose novel *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, gentleman* (1759-66) included blank pages, doodles, a marbled endpaper inserted in the text, and other graphic interventions by the author.<sup>51</sup> Translated almost immediately into most European languages, the work found an appreciative audience in France, where Sterne was called 'the Rabelais of England' and praised by Voltaire and Diderot.<sup>52</sup> Among Sterne's later admirers was the French author Charles Nodier, who in 1830 published the novel *Histoire du roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux*, a tale mentioned in *Tristram Shandy* that never quite gets told in either work.<sup>53</sup> Nodier imitated Sterne's typographical fancies, varying the font size and occasionally composing the text in pictographic format, but he also did something that Sterne did not do: he engaged the services of an illustrator to add vignettes interspersed throughout the text. Though he was not credited in the book, this illustrator was Tony Johannot in his first major commission. The resultant work, a collaboration between artist and writer, is credited with having introduced the new medium of wood engraving into French book illustration, an innovation that Gigoux would develop more fully later, in the 1835 *Gil Blas*.<sup>54</sup> But perhaps it was through this earlier project, following in the footsteps of both Laurence Sterne and Charles Nodier, that Johannot found the inspiration to create his own novel as a vehicle to display the full range of his graphic imagination. Neither of the two earlier works, however, not *Tristram Shandy* nor *Le roi de Bohême*, can compare with Johannot's *Voyage où il vous plaira* as an illustrated book, the former having very few images, the latter being more conventional in illustrative strategy, if not in narrative style. *Voyage où il vous plaira* stands alone as a free-form illustrated novel, surpassed in imaginative structure only by Grandville's *Un autre monde*.

#### Grandville's *Un autre monde*

Jean-Ignace-Julien Gérard, known simply as Grandville, published *Un autre monde*, a loosely organized novel in pictures, in 1844, after Johannot's *Voyage où il vous plaira*, although he had completed it earlier, in 1843. Though the two works are quite dissimilar, Grandville claimed that Johannot had plagiarized his idea, provoking a bitter quarrel and narrowly avoiding a duel.<sup>55</sup> Johannot's project had been actively collaborative between the artist and two writers: its final illustration depicts the two writers' pens and the artist's pencil lying together in peaceful repose. Grandville's *Un autre monde*, however, shows the writer and artist in opposition: in the opening pages of *Un autre monde* the artist's pencil declares its independence of the writer, and, as it goes off on its own adventures, the writer's pen thumbs its nose in derision.

Grandville actually attempted to write the text himself, but gave up, stating ‘the pen rebels in my hands at forming sentences.’<sup>56</sup> The publisher, Henri Fournier, then engaged Taxile Delord, the editor of the journal *Le Charivari*, to write the text, although the contract stipulated that the text would be written according to Grandville’s own notes.<sup>57</sup> Probably it was in deference to Grandville’s decisive role in the conception of the work that Delord’s name appears nowhere except on the final page – a gesture that would have infuriated Lagenevais. Grandville’s concept of narration is demonstrated by the work’s complete title: *Un autre monde: Transformations, visions, incarnations, ascensions, excursions, locomotions, explorations, pérégrinations, excursions, stations, folâtreries, cosmogonies, rêveries, lubies, fantasmagories, apothéoses, zoomorphoses, lithomorphoses, métamorphoses, métempsychoses, et autres choses* (Another world: Transformations, visions, incarnations, ascensions, locomotions, explorations, peregrinations, excursions, vacations, caprices, cosmogonies, reveries, whimsies, phantasmagorias, apotheoses, zoomorphoses, lithomorphoses, metamorphoses, metempsychoses, and other things). The organization of Tony Johannot’s *Voyage où il vous plaira* was similar, though not quite so radical, with its cover page also inventorying aspects of the non-linear narrative that ensued: ‘vignettes, legends, episodes, commentaries, incidents, notes, and poetry’.<sup>58</sup> In this way, both artists demonstrate a logic that is peculiarly visual, rather than linear and narrative, and that resurfaced later in the experimental novels and poetry of the twentieth century.

In *Un autre monde*, neither Grandville’s images nor Delord’s text present the kind of narrative that nineteenth-century audiences had come to expect, and so it is no surprise that there was only one edition, although it now ranks among the most sought-after of nineteenth-century illustrated books. Grandville’s contemporaries much preferred his earlier work, *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux*, which was more conventional in narrative structure. Indeed, in his 1847 obituary for Grandville published in *La Presse*, Théophile Gautier singled out the earlier work as Grandville’s ‘true masterpiece’, while *Un autre monde* was not even mentioned.<sup>59</sup> In *Un autre monde* Grandville is thinking in pictures, in the kind of free-association characteristic of the dream state, of surrealism, or of twentieth-century experimental novels. With these works, we must begin to ask ourselves ‘what is narrative?’ The linear and logical development of plot in nineteenth-century novels was itself new and had barely replaced the earlier picaresque formula, which was basically a compilation of adventures, such as Lesage’s *Gil Blas* or Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. Grandville basically rejected both structures, the tight narrative form of contemporary novels as well as the earlier loose picaresque model, to present his images in series, each organized around a fantastic idea and illustrated by the text. For example, in chapters 3 and 4, ‘Concert à la vapeur’ (‘A steam concert’) and its sequel ‘La rhubarbe et le séné’ (‘The rhubarb and the senna’), Grandville was inspired by the contemporary interest in steam power, the

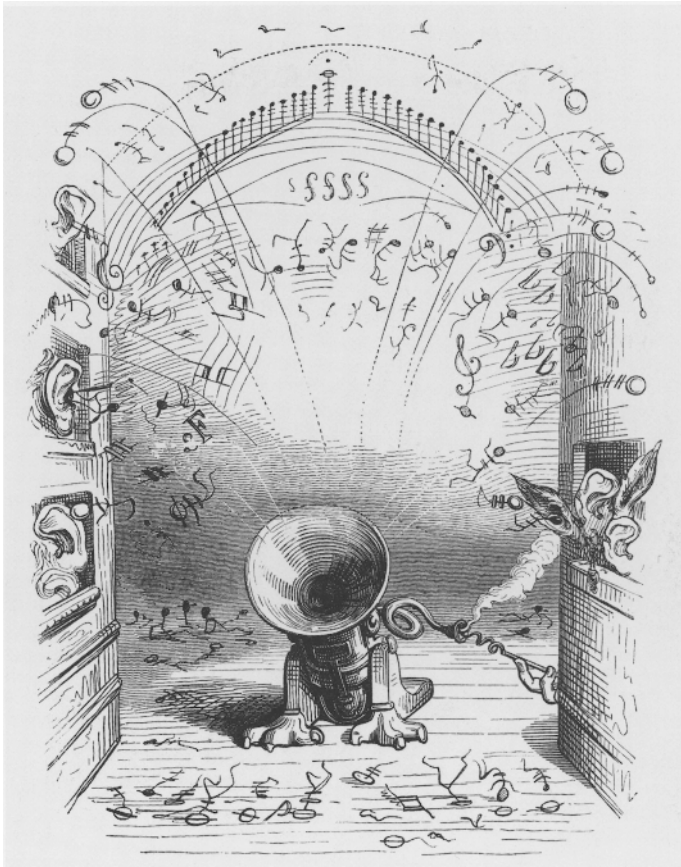


14. Grandville, 'Mlle Tender and M. Tunnel in the duet Left bank and Right bank', *Un autre monde*, 1844, p. 20, wood engraving

15. Grandville, 'At the Fireworks in D', *Un autre monde*, 1844, p. 24, wood engraving

basis for much of nineteenth-century industry. He starts from the notion that if steam can power industrial machinery, trains and boats, why not a steam orchestra? He then imagines what that would look like and how it would function – or malfunction, as the case may be. Trombones could be powered by steam, but so could singers and their accompanists, whose music is represented by words scattered across the page: 'ha ha ha, ah ah ah, oh la la' (ill. 14) in a manner that would become familiar in the twentieth century through the calligrams of Guillaume Apollinaire. There could even be a steam-driven child-prodigy musician, who, as Grandville tells us in a caption written in a clever imitation of a child's writing, is 'barely out of the cradle, at most 22 months old'.<sup>60</sup> Too much steam, however, could be disastrous, as he notes in the text accompanying one of the work's most imaginative images (ill. 15):

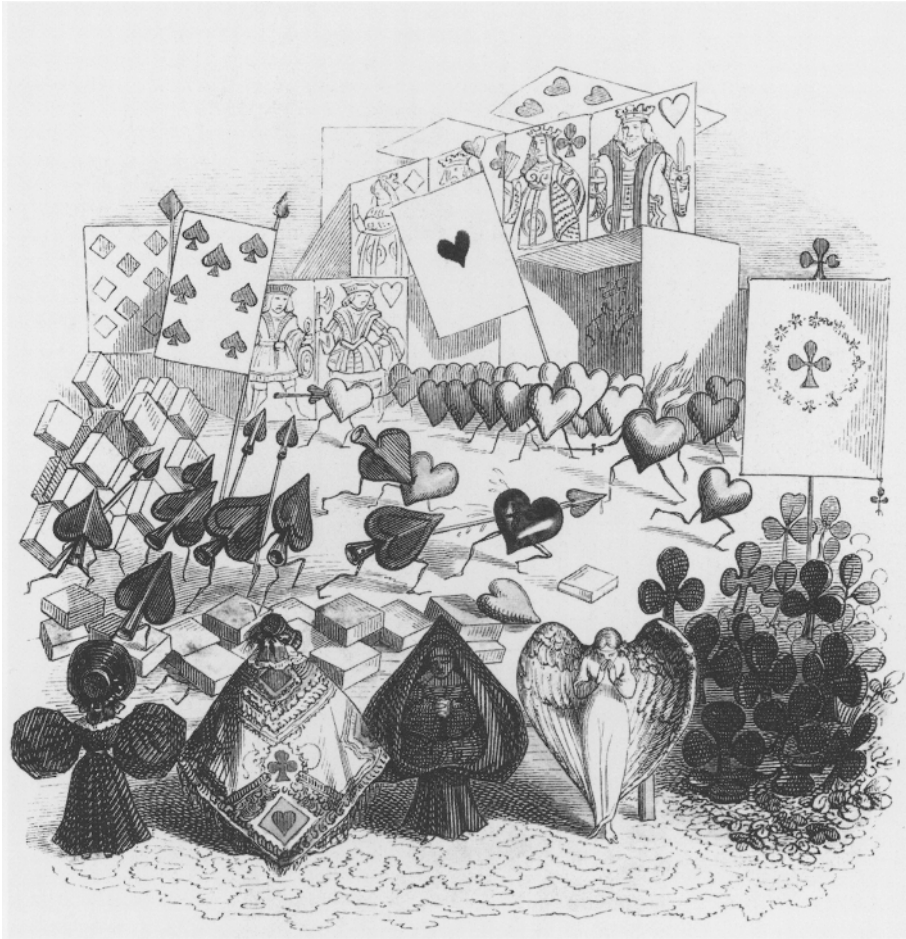
At the fireworks in D, at the moment when the fugue is ending *smorzando* with a sweet and dreamy melody, an ophicleide suddenly burst from too much



harmony like a bomb hurling forth black notes and white notes, screeching trills, quavers and semi-quavers. Clouds of musical smoke and flames of melody filled the air. The ears of many music lovers were damaged, others were hurt by the clashing notes of the key of F with the key of G.<sup>61</sup>

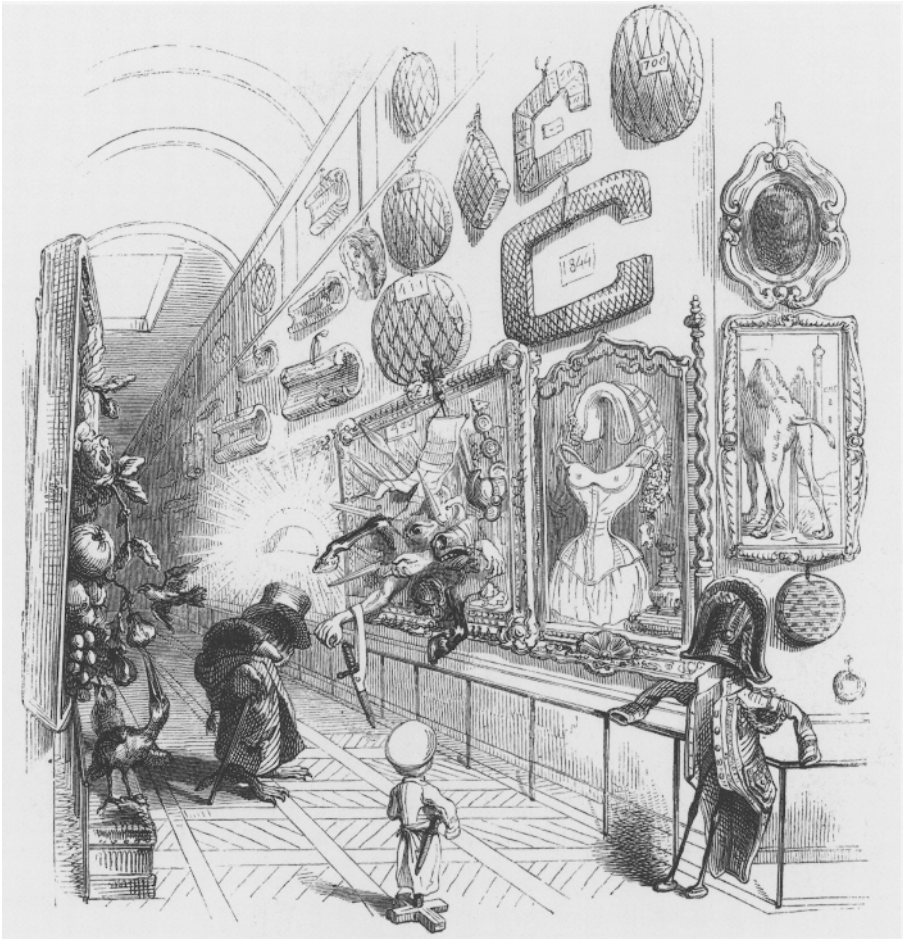
Each chapter in *Un autre monde* begins with a different concept. In chapter 6, 'A vol et à vue d'oiseau' ('In flight, a bird's eye view'), the protagonist's ability to fly through the air results in a series of images seen from above. This theme is revisited in chapter 20, 'Locomotions aériennes' ('Aerial locomotion'), which shows the bizarre possibilities of human flying machines. Chapter 24, 'Les grands et les petits' ('The high and the low'), depicts a society where the rank of the inhabitants is indicated by their relative height. Probably his most influential image occurred in chapter 32, 'Le métamorphoses du sommeil' ('The metamorphoses of sleep'), where his 'Battle of the playing cards' (ill. 16) inspired John Tenniel's illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in wonderland* (1866).<sup>62</sup>





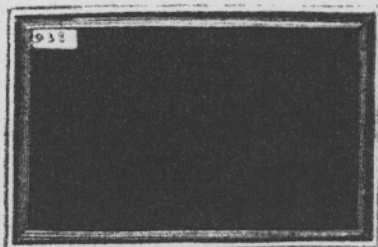
16. Grandville, 'The Battle of Playing Cards', *Un autre monde*, 1844, opp. p. 247, wood engraving

In *Un autre monde*, Grandville shifts easily between modes, from fantasy to satire. In chapter 14, 'Le Louvre des marionnettes' ('The Louvre of the marionettes'), the protagonist Hahbille makes a balloon flight to an exotic country peopled with marionettes instead of humans. He is surprised to discover that this strange country also has a national museum, and even, like Paris, has an annual Salon, an exhibition of art that he is fortunate enough to be able to visit. Grandville then takes us through this imaginary exhibition, a thinly disguised satire on the French art establishment. Paintings here are so big that the museum entrance must be demolished to bring them inside. Upon entering, Hahbille finds an exhibition



17. Grandville, 'The Louvre of the Marionettes', *Un autre monde*, 1844, wood engraving

catalogue, which looks very like the *livrets* sold at the Paris Salon. The first painting listed is *The angel of painting imploring divine mercy for the jury*.<sup>63</sup> Grandville then shows us the galleries in which the paintings are displayed, all duly listed in the Salon catalogue, including *An eclogue from Virgil*, *The crossing of the Red Sea*, *Portrait of Mme P. de L. with her dog and her diamonds*, *The angry waves* and *A frame worth two thousand francs based on the process of Ruolz and Elkington*, all of which are being admired by mechanical marionettes, who, like Parisian audiences, clearly lack aesthetic discrimination.<sup>64</sup>



**938. Vue de la Hougue, - Effet de nuit.**  
Jean-Louis PETIT.

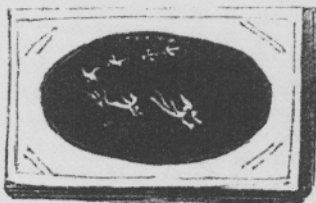
Nous ne parlerons pas de madame *Langrand*. On trouve que ses paysages reproduisent beaucoup trop la nature.

L'histoire a beaucoup donné cette année, avec bonheur parfois, avec grandeur toujours.



**890. Combat des Centaures et des Lapithes. MULLER.**  
**400. Délivrance de saint Pierre, de M. DUVAL fils.**

Ange de Salvator Rosa, seconde édition revue, corrigée et considérablement augmentée, le tout heureusement rajeuni par une étude de soldat qui dort debout.



**1033. Steeple-chasse d'anges, par M. ROGER (Adolphe).**

« Le saint cortège traverse la constellation du capricorne, ce qui indique l'époque de Noël. »  
( *Extrait du Livret* )

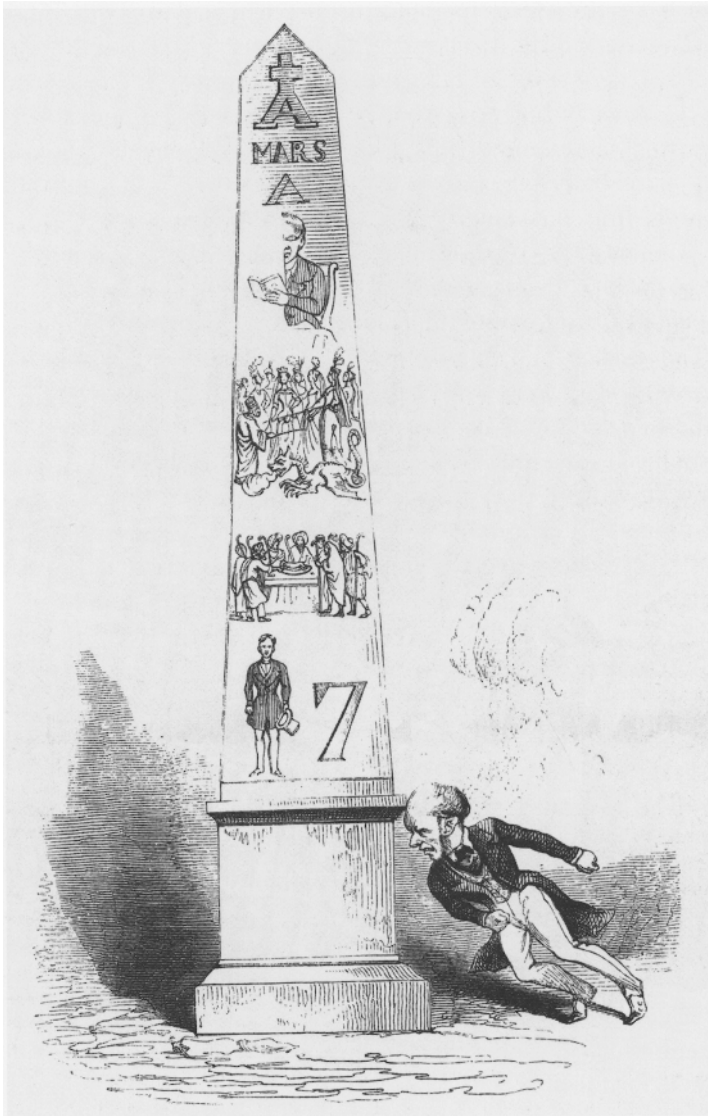
Hahblle proceeds to read the critics' reviews aloud in front of the paintings (ill. 17), each a satire on the pomposity and vacuity of art critics and each accompanied by Grandville's literal rendering of the critics' words: 'Nothing is comparable to the battle scene of our great painter Jérôme Tulipier. What combat! What shock! What turbulence! What tumult! What an eruption! Angry heads, menacing arms, sabres and swords, everything is alive, and emerges right out of the canvas' – and indeed the horses, warriors and weapons, in Grandville's drawing, do emerge from the painting directly into the gallery space.<sup>65</sup> 'This morning, when the windows were opened to let in a breath of air for a lady who had just fainted from the heat, birds entered and *threw* themselves on the landscape by our famous Thomas Gorju representing an orchard in Normandy' – here Grandville shows us the birds circling the painting.<sup>66</sup> 'The brilliance of a sunrise has dazzled everyone, even a blind mole who happened to wander into the room' – in Grandville's rendering, the canvas has disappeared into a white blaze.<sup>67</sup>

In form, this chapter follows the 'salon in caricature,' a new genre just beginning to appear. While caricatures of individual works of art were not a new phenomenon, 'salons in caricature' were intended to review the entire exhibition, satirizing the installations, the spectators, the jury, as well as individual works of art. Invented by the artist Bertall (Albert d'Arnoux), the first salon in caricature was published in 1843 (ill. 18), the year Grandville began working on *Un autre monde*.<sup>68</sup> In form it was much more modest than Grandville's work, for while Bertall caricatured each work separately, retaining its two-dimensional quality on the page, Grandville broke through the barriers separating image and audience, invoking 'another world' while criticizing his own. The 'salon in caricature' quickly became a standard feature of the annual art season, published in the illustrated press and sold as inexpensive booklets resembling (and satirizing) *Salon livrets*. Nonetheless, none ever proved as radical as Grandville's 'Le Louvre des marionnettes'. Individual images in the caricatured Salons were often witty – their caricatures of major paintings are still familiar to us today – but as series they lacked the unifying narrative premise and biting satire of Grandville's work.

Grandville ended *Un autre monde* with a rebus (ill. 19), cautioning the reader against attempting to decipher his imagery too closely. In other words, we should not attempt to read images the way we read text. His choice of a rebus was telling, because, in fact, rebuses had just become all the rage in Paris, introduced that very year into the journals *Le Charivari* and *L'Illustration*.<sup>69</sup> Rebuses present the very essence of the word/image relationship, where the images literally incarnate the words and vice versa. Which returns us to Thomas Rowlandson, who opened *The tour of Doctor Syntax in search of the picturesque: a poem* with a rebus, the first three letters of the word *picturesque* being formed by picturesque ruins.

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18. Bertall, *Le Salon de 1843*, 1843, wood engraving



19. Grandville, Rebus: 'Ah, believe me, dear reader, do not behave like this man!', *Un autre monde*, 1844, p. 290, wood engraving

Grandville's images well illustrate the kind of non-linear imaginative structure and broad spectrum of illustrational strategies characteristic of the work of nineteenth-century illustrators. The artists I have discussed here, and many of their colleagues, were among the first to seek these alternative forms of narration, introducing new formal languages into the visual arts. It is no doubt because modernism so condemned narration that scant scholarly attention has been paid to their work. The importance of these artists, however, was well understood by nineteenth-century artists, many of whom – Cézanne, Monet and Van Gogh, to cite a few – collected and utilized their imagery as inspiration for their own. Despite this, the illustrated printed book scarcely outlasted the century that saw its birth, and survives today principally in the realm of the 'artist's book', children's literature and comics. Nonetheless, it had its golden age in the nineteenth century. As long as we think of illustration as the handmaiden of literary texts, or as somehow inferior to painting and sculpture, we will not only have impoverished much of nineteenth-century visual culture but we will have deprived ourselves of a good deal of viewing pleasure.

## NOTES

This essay is based on the lecture I gave at the Van Gogh Museum on 13 April 2008 as Van Gogh Museum Visiting Fellow in the History of 19th-Century Art. I am grateful for the support of a PSC-CUNY grant from the CUNY Research Foundation.

1. To cite just a few of many pioneering publications, see especially: Jean Adhémar and Jean-Pierre Seguin, *Le livre romantique*, Paris 1968; Gordon N. Ray, *The illustrator and the book in England from 1790 to 1914*, New York 1976; Michel Melot, *L'illustration*, Paris 1984; David Kunzle, *History of the comic strip*, 2 vols., Berkeley 1973-90; Gordon N. Ray, *The art of the French illustrated book, 1700-1914*, New York 1982; Musée national des arts et traditions populaires, Paris, *L'imagerie populaire française*, 2 vols., Paris 1990-96; and Beatrice Farwell, *French*

*popular lithographic imagery, 1815-1870*, 12 vols., Chicago 1981-97.

2. The major exception here is the extensive bibliography of the work of Honoré Daumier, well-known as a painter, sculptor, caricaturist and book illustrator, but his success occludes the fact that he is virtually the only nineteenth-century French illustrator to receive adequate art-historical attention; there is relatively little scholarship on other major figures such as Grandville and Gustave Doré, and virtually none on Tony Johannot, Jean Gigoux, Cham or Bertall.

3. Milan Kundera, 'An introduction to a variation', *The New York Times*, 6 January 1985, Section 7, p. 1.

4. *L'histoire de Mr Jabot* was written in 1831; while *Les amours de Mr Vieux Bois* was written earlier, in 1827, it was not published until 1837. For the chronology of Töpffer's picture stories and his complete comic oeuvre in English translation, see David Kunzle (ed. and trans.), *Rodolphe Töpffer: The complete comic strips*, Jackson, Miss., 2007. Töpffer's picture stories have been republished in French (their original language) as *Rodolphe Töpffer: M. Jabot, M. Crépin, M. Vieux Bois, M. Pencil, Docteur Festus, Histoire d'Albert, M. Cryptogame*, Paris

1975. Töpffer used the term in his 'Réflexions à propos d'un programme,' first published in *La Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève*, no. 1 (January 1836), pp. 42-61, and no. 4 (April 1836), pp. 314-41; it is reprinted in Thierry Groensteen and Benoît Peters (eds.), *Töpffer, l'invention de la bande dessinée*, Paris 1994, pp. 144-60, p. 150.

5. Töpffer's *Histoire de Mr Cryptogame* was 'borrowed' by publishers in many different countries, resulting in (among many others) *The veritable history of bachelor Butterfly* (1845) in England and the United States, and *Reizen en Avonturen van Mijinhoeer Prikkebeen* (1858) in Holland. Kunzle lists all the various editions in *Rodolphe Töpffer*, pp. 642-43.

6. See William Combe, *Doctor Syntax's three tours: In search of the picturesque, consolation and a wife. The original edition, complete and unabridged, with the life and adventures of the author, now first written, by John Camden Hotten*, London [1868], p. 28.

7. An 'Advertisement' signed 'The Author' at the beginning of each edition of *Dr. Syntax* explained their working method.

8. Gustave Doré, *Les travaux d'Hercule*, Paris 1847; he was fifteen years old at the time. On the development of the visual language of comics, see Patricia Mainardi, 'The invention of comics', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 6, no. 1 (spring 2007).

9. Cham, *Impressions de voyage de Monsieur Boniface, Ex-réfactaire de la 4<sup>me</sup> du 5<sup>me</sup> de la 10<sup>me</sup>*, Paris 1844.

10. 'Un jour, on vint me demander cent vignettes pour une nouvelle édition de ce merveilleux livre. J'avoue que j'eux un moment d'effroi, presque. Il me semblait que je n'y trouverais jamais cent sujets de compositions. Mais, pourtant je les fis. Quelques jours après, les éditeurs m'en demandèrent trois cents de plus. Alors, moi de recommencer à lire et à croquer au fur et à mesure mes illustrations. La semaine suivante, les éditeurs s'apercevant de l'attrait que ces vignettes donnait aux livraisons, m'en redemandèrent encore deux cents nouvelles. Bref, j'en fis six cents, et je crois que j'aurais pu continuer indéfiniment.' Jean Gigoux, *Causeries sur les artistes de mon temps*, Paris 1885; Alain-René Lesage, *L'histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane*, Paris 1835.

11. 'un des cinq ou six principaux ouvrages à figures du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle'. Henri Béraldi, 'Gigoux (Jean), peintre,' *Les graveurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*:

*guide de l'amateur d'estampes modernes*, 12 vols., Paris 1885-92, vol. 7, pp. 109-28, pp. 112-13.

12. 'Nous ressemblions, comme auroit dit Homère, à deux milans'. Lesage, *Gil Blas* (1835), p. 394.

13. Ibid., p. 421.

14. Ibid., pp. 687-90.

15. F. de Lagenevais [Henri Blaze de Bury], 'La littérature illustrée', *Revue des deux mondes*, n.s. 1, no. 3 (March 1843), pp. 645-71.

16. 'L'illustration est un symptôme de décadence littéraire.' Ibid., p. 653.

17. 'Chaque art a son genre de beauté particulière.' Ibid.

18. 'Les gravures d'ailleurs ne nuiraient pas au texte, ne rompraient pas l'unité d'impression nécessaire à toute lecture... [vignettes] ne font que jeter le désordre dans les pages, elles dérangent cette harmonie régulière des lignes, à laquelle l'œil est habitué...' 'Le dessinateur se substitue ainsi au poète.' Ibid., pp. 653, 651.

19. Ibid., p. 648, 655, 664.

20. Ibid., p. 648.

21. 'l'un des plus remarquables que aient jamais été publiés.' Ibid., pp. 651-52. Béraldi, 'Johannot (Tony),' *Les graveurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 7, pp. 245-77, p. 271.

22. Lagenevais, 'La littérature illustrée', pp. 653, 655.

23. 'Comme la gravure sur bois et celle à la mécanique, comme toutes les innovations qui tendent à séduire l'acheteur par le bon marché, les *magasins pittoresques* sont nés en Angleterre, la patrie naturelle de toutes les idées commerciales.' Ibid., p. 664.

24. The first issue of the *Illustrated London News* was published on 14 May 1842, the first issue of *L'Illustration* on 4 March 1843. Lagenevais's article appeared in the 15 February 1843 issue of *Revue des deux mondes*.

25. Lagenevais, 'La littérature illustrée', pp. 648, 655.

26. *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, 10 vols., Paris 1840-42. See Segolène Le Men and Luce Abélès, exhib. cat. *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes: Panorama social du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris (Musée d'Orsay) 1993.

27. Lagenevais cited this publication, incorrectly but sarcastically, as *Les animaux peints par eux-mêmes*.

28. *Heads of the people, or portraits of the English, drawn by Kenny Meadows*, London 1840, was first issued in 13 monthly instalments,



November 1838 to October 1839.

29. *Heads of the people* was republished in France as *Les anglais peints par eux-mêmes*, trans. Emile de La Bédollière, 2 vols., Paris 1840-41. On physiologies, see Andrée Lhéritier, *Les physiologies 1826-94*, Paris 1955; Andrée Lhéritier, *Les physiologies 1840-1845*, Paris 1966 [1958]. There are several additional articles on physiologies in *Etudes de Presse*, n.s. 9, no. 17 (1957).

30. See Patricia Mainardi, 'Des débuts de la caricature lithographique à la Restauration', in Jean-Yves Mollier, Martine Reid and Jean-Claude Yon (eds.), *(Re)Penser la Restauration*, Paris 2005, pp. 211-22.

31. Charles Nodier, Alphonse de Cailleux and Justin Taylor (eds.), *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, 23 vols., Paris 1820-78. In the age of photography such publications became less and less attractive to buyers, and so the project was never completed.

32. See Bernard-Henri Gausseron, *Les keepsakes et les annuaires illustrés de l'époque romantique. Essai de bibliographie*, Paris 1896; and Adhémar et Seguin, *Le livre romantique*, pp. 54-57.

33. 'ce don d'ubiquité de M. de Balzac'. Lagenevais, 'La littérature illustrée', p. 664.

34. Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie humaine*, in *Œuvres complètes de M. de Balzac*, 17 vols., Paris 1842-48.

35. See David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French political culture, 1830-1848: Charles Philippon and the illustrated press*, Oxford 2000, pp. 20-23.

36. '[la gravure] n'a plus voulu traduire le texte, mais le dicter.' Lagenevais, 'La littérature illustrée', pp. 651, 655.

37. On the chronology of early comics, see Patricia Mainardi, 'The invention of comics,' *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 6, no. 1 (spring 2007). The 'Collection des Jabots,' as Philippon and Aubert titled their comic book series, included the following titles: 1839: *L'histoire de Mr Jabot*; *Mr Crépin*, and *Les amours de Mr Vieux Bois*, all by Rodolphe Töpffer, as well as *Histoire de Mr Lajaunisse* and *Mr Lamélasse*, both by Cham; 1840: *Histoire de Mr Jobard*, and *Deux vieilles filles vaccinées à marier*, both by Cham, and *Histoire de Mr de Vertpré et de sa ménagère aussi*, by E. Forest; 1841: *Un génie incompris* [Mr Barnabé Gogo] by Cham; 1842: *Histoire du prince Colibri et de la fée Caperdulaboula*, and *Aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse*, both by Cham. The last of the Collection des Jabots was

Gustave Doré's *Les travaux d'Hercule*, published in 1847.

38. Tony Johannot, Alfred de Musset and P.-J. Stahl, *Voyage où il vous plaira, livre écrit à la plume et au crayon avec vignettes, légendes, épisodes, commentaires, incidents, notes et poésie*, Paris 1843; Grandville, *Un autre monde: Transformations, visions, incarnations, ascensions, excursions, locomotions, explorations, pérégrinations, excursions, stations, folâtreries, cosmogonies, rêveries, lubies, fantasmagories, apothéoses, zoomorphoses, lithomorphoses, métamorphoses, métempsychoses, et autres choses*, Paris 1844.

39. 'le roi de l'illustration'. Théophile Gautier, 'Tony Johannot,' *La Presse*, 16 June 1845, reprinted in his *Portraits contemporains*, Paris 1874, pp. 226-30, p. 228. See also Aristide Marie, *Alfred et Tony Johannot, peintres, graveurs et vignettistes*, Paris 1925.

40. On the last pages of the novel there is a note 'Au lecteur et à Tony Johannot,' whose first sentence states 'L'idée d'écrire ce livre nous a été suggérée par Tony Johannot' ('To the Reader and to Tony Johannot.' 'The idea of writing this book was suggested to us by Tony Johannot'). Johannot, *Voyage où il vous plaira*, pp. 169-70.

41. 'Le Voyage ou il vous plaira devant être essentiellement et par sa nature même un livre de fantaisie, on comprendra que nous laissions toute liberté aux auteurs. Leur projet étant d'écrire et de dessiner alternativement, suivant qu'il y aura lieu d'écrire ou de dessiner, et que la plume ou le crayon devront être plus propres à rendre leur pensée, et le nombre des vignettes devant être considérable, relativement à l'étendue du texte, il arrivera que parmi nos livraisons, les unes se composeront de texte et de vignettes tout à la fois, les autres de vignettes seulement.' The four-page prospectus and 'Avis' are bound into the copy of *Voyage où il vous plaira* held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, which is also available online; see p. 4 of the prospectus.

42. By 1842, Töpffer had published: *Histoire de Mr Jabot* (1833); *Les Amours de Mr Vieux Bois* (1837); *Mr Crépin* (1837); *Le Docteur Festus* (1840), and *Monsieur Pencil* (1840).

43. 'Nos chevaux partirent comme le vent.' Johannot, *Voyage où il vous plaira*, p. 32.

44. 'Pour sortir de la ville, il nous fallut passer devant la maison de ma fiancée! La fenêtre de sa chambre était entr'ouverte, et je vis la douce fille assise devant un clavecin que lui avait légué son

oncle l'organiste. Elle chantait.' Ibid.

45. 'La fenêtre de sa chambre était entr'ouverte, et elle chantait.' Ibid., unnumbered page, facing p. 32.

46. 'Elle chantait... et moi je parlait!' Ibid., p. 37.

47. Ibid., p. 14. Although there were numerous editions of the voyages of James Cook in both English and French, the edition that inspired Johannot was probably the much-reprinted Henri Lebrun, *Voyages et aventures du capitaine Cook*, Paris 1837. There is no publication with the exact title given by Johannot.

48. 'Je ne vois plus que navires qui se croisent sur l'immensité des mers, que chevaux et voitures qui roulent pesamment sur tous les points du globe... Que courageux et hardis piétons qui traversent les sables brulants des déserts, et qui gravissent les pics escarpés des Alpes et des Cordillières!' The two full-page illustrations are unnumbered, placed between pp. 14 and 15.

49. Since nineteenth-century books were often sold unbound, with the purchaser choosing the type and quality of the binding, the table of contents always included a table of illustrations with an indication of where they were to be placed. In French publications this was situated at the end of the book. See 'Placement des gravures,' in Johannot, *Voyage où il vous plaira*, pp. 171-72.

50. For a brief discussion of *macédoine* prints, see Beatrice Farwell, exhib. cat. *The charged image: French lithographic caricature 1816-1848*, Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara Museum of Art) 1989, pp. 74-75. Although David S. Kerr credits Charles Philippon with introducing the *macédoine* print into France in 1831, such prints were already common in the 1820s; Kerr, *Caricature*, p. 61. See also Mark Hallett, 'The medley print in early eighteenth-century London,' *Art History* 20, no. 2 (June 1997), pp. 214-37.

51. Laurence Sterne's *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, gentleman* was published in London in nine volumes from 1759 to 1767. Although there were numerous contemporary editions of *Tristram Shandy*, the standard text is reprinted from an edition supervised by Sterne himself. One example is Laurence Sterne, *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, gentleman*, vols. 1 and 2 of Melvyn New and Joan New (eds.), *The Florida edition of the works of Laurence Sterne*, 6 vols., Gainesville 1978. A page of sheet music for 'Lilliberlero' is often inserted

in *Tristram Shandy*, at one of the points where Uncle Toby whistles the tune, but this was a posthumous addition and does not appear in any of the editions that Sterne supervised nor in the French editions published later.

52. *Tristram Shandy* was soon translated into several European languages: German in 1765, French in 1769, Dutch in 1777, Russian in 1790, Italian in 1805; see Alan B. Howes (ed.), *Sterne: the critical heritage*, London 1974. On Sterne's influence in France, see Howes, *Sterne: the critical heritage*, pp. 20-22, 390-95; he reprints many of the contemporary French reviews and critiques. See also Lana Asfour, *Laurence Sterne in France*, London 2008; she discusses only eighteenth-century translations, not Sterne's nineteenth-century followers.

53. The epigraph on the title page reads: 'Il y avait une fois un roi de Bohême qui avait sept châteaux. Trimm.' ('Once upon a time there was a king of Bohemia who had seven castles. Trimm.') Corporal Trim (not Trimm) is a character in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

54. For a brief appreciation of the importance of Nodier's *Histoire du roi de Bohême*, see Ray, *The art of the French illustrated book*, pp. 256-58. The standard biography of Johannot is that of Aristide Marie, cited above, n. 39.

55. The incident of the threatened duel is recounted by Annie Renonciat, *La vie et l'œuvre de J.-J. Grandville*, Paris 1985, p. 231. Both works were published on subscription: the first instalment of *Voyage où il vous plaira* was announced on 10 December 1842, the last on 23 December 1843; the first instalment of *Un autre monde* was announced on 18 February 1843, the last on 11 November 1843. Dates are taken from the *Bibliographie de la France* for 1842 and 1843, an official weekly bulletin. Publication as a book usually followed (Grandville) or was simultaneous with (Johannot) the last *livraison*.

56. 'La plume est rebelle sous mes doigts pour former des phrases.' See the interview with Grandville reported by Jean Gaberel, *Essai sur le caractère artistique et littéraire des œuvres de R. Toepffer*, Geneva 1846, p. 4; the passage is reprinted in Philippe Kaenel, *Le métier d'illustrateur 1830-1880: Rodolphe Töpffer, J.-J. Grandville, Gustave Doré*, 2nd rev. ed., Geneva 2005, p. 284.

57. Grandville's contract with Fournier, dated 19 December 1842, stated 'Le texte sera rédigé d'après vos notes par un littérateur dont le travail

restera à ma charge' ('the text will be written according to your notes by an author whose work will be paid for by me'); see Renonciat, *La vie et l'œuvre de J.-J. Grandville* p. 230.

Renonciat's bibliography lists the contract as being in an unnamed private collection.

58. 'vignettes, légendes, épisodes, commentaires, incidents, notes et poésie'. See n. 38.

59. 'son vrai chef d'œuvre'. Théophile Gautier, 'Grandville,' *La Presse*, 24 March 1847, reprinted in his *Portraits contemporains*, pp. 230-33.

60. 'à peine au sortie de nourrice, 22 mois au plus je comptais'. Grandville, 'La rhubarbe et le séné', *Un autre monde*, p. 23.

61. 'Dans le feu d'artifice en ré, au moment où la fugue se termine *smorzando* par une mélodie douce et rêveuse, un ophicléide, trop chargé d'harmonie, a éclaté subitement comme une bombe lançant des noires, des blanches, des *gruppetti* de notes aiguës, de croches, de doubles croches; des nuages de fumée musicale et des flammes de mélodie se sont répandus dans l'atmosphère. Plusieurs dilettanti ont eu les oreilles déchirées, d'autres ont été blessés par les éclats de la clé de *fa* et de la clé de *sol*.' Ibid., pp. 23-24.

62. Tenniel's depiction of the Red Queen and her court is similar in concept to Grandville's battle of playing cards.

63. 'L'ange de la Peinture implorant la miséricorde divine pour le jury'. Grandville, *Un autre monde*, p. 83.

64. Ibid., pp. 83-85. Grandville's salon catalogue is reproduced in format identical to that of the Paris Salon, with its title only slightly altered to read: *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie exposés au Musée royal pour l'année présente, y compris les années précédentes et celles qui suivent*. Among the paintings listed in the catalogue were: 100 – LeBlanc (Anastasius), 200 – Vertchoux (Gaspard), *Une églogue de Virgile*. 410 – Duflot (Neptune), *Le passage de la Mer Rouge*. 130 – Shwplklmssth (Conrad), de Munich, *Portrait de Mme P. de L., de son chien et de ses diamants*. 101 – Dumortier (Nicolas), *Vagues irritées*. 9999 – Baudrichon (Numa), *Une bordure de deux mille francs d'après le procédé Ruolz et Elkington*.

65. 'Rien n'est comparable à la bataille de notre grand peintre Jérôme Tulipier. Quelle mêlée ! quel choc ! quel tourbillon ! quel ouragan !

quelle trombe ! Têtes furieuses, bras menaçans, sabres et épées, tout cela vit, sort de la toile et combat.' Ibid., p. 85.

66. 'Ce matin, en ouvrant les fenêtres pour donner de l'air à une dame qui venait de s'évanouir suffoquée par la chaleur, on a vu les oiseaux se précipiter sur le paysage de notre célèbre Thomas Gorju représentant un verger de Normandie.' Ibid.

67. 'L'éclat d'un *Soleil levant* a ébloui tous les regards, jusqu'à ceux d'une taupe qui était parvenue à s'introduire dans le salon.' Ibid., p. 86.

68. The first salon in caricature was 'Pérégrinations burlesques à travers tous chemins, par MM. Bertall et Léfex,' published as the 7<sup>me</sup> livraison of *Les Omnibus* (1843), then reissued separately as *Le Salon de 1843 (Ne pas confondre avec celui de l'artiste-éditeur Challamel, éditeur-artiste)*. Appendice au Livret. Représenté par 37 copies de Bertal (sic). *Etudes faites aux portes de Louvre le 15 mars 1843*, Paris 1843. Pierre-Joseph Challamel published anthologies of images of works from the Salon. On the Salons in caricature, see Marie-Claude Chadeaux, 'Le salon caricatural de 1846 et les autres salons caricaturaux,' *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, March 1968, pp. 161-76, and Thierry Chabanne, exhib. cat. *Les salons caricaturaux*, Paris (Musée d'Orsay), 1990.

69. The literal translation of the rebus from image to words is 'A crois moi A mi-lecteur, neuf fées Pâques homme sept,' or (in good French) 'Ah! Crois-moi, ami lecteur, ne fais pas comme cet [homme]' ('Ah! Believe me, dear reader, don't behave like this man' [who is breaking his head on the rebus]). There is very little literature on rebuses, and what little exists is usually written from a literary, not art-historical, point of view. For a general history, see Octave Delepierre, *Essai historique et bibliographique sur les rebuts*, London 1870.



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Paul Gauguin's *Vision of the sermon* (1888), one of the iconic works of the late nineteenth century, continues to provoke profound reassessment and interpretation by art historians, and it is central to this third volume of *Van Gogh Studies*: Dario Gamboni discusses the painting as a self-reflexive work dealing in visual terms with issues of perception, cognition and representation; Juliet Simpson addresses the art critic Aurier's contribution to the promotion of Gauguin as the exemplary symbolist artist; while Rodolphe Rapetti examines Emile Bernard's artistic response to *Vision of the sermon* in the context of Rosicrucianism; the Belgian art world's critical reaction to this and other works by the artist is meticulously described and analysed in Elise Eckermann's essay; while June Hargrove presents a challenging vision of Gauguin's portraits of his 'alter ego' Meijer de Haan.

Other contributions include Sandra Kisters's examination of the way the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen functioned as a role model for the Musée Rodin in Paris; Richard Thomson's discussion of the diverse ways in which French artists working in the early Third Republic responded to contemporary concepts of '*la psychologie nouvelle*'; and, finally, a fresh view of nineteenth-century illustrations, including caricatures, offered by Patricia Mainardi.

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